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ARIADNÊ

THE STORY OF A DREAM.

BY OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "PUCK," "SIGNA," "TRICOTRIN," "TWO LITTLE
WOODEN SHOES," ETC.

"La forza d'Amore non riguarda al delitto."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ARIADNÊ:

THE STORY OF A DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

“THERE has been a new statue found at Daïla,” said Maryx to me one fair sunny day in the autumn time, pausing before my stall, as I stitched at some boots of my roisterous neighbour the blacksmith, whose hammers were then ringing loudly enough to split one’s ears at his open forge in the back of the Via Giulia.

“There has been a new statue found at Daïla, you must come and see it,” said Maryx, with the sun in his handsome fearless eyes.

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“You must leave off your stitching, and come and see it. She will not care to go without you. No; it is not very ancient. About the time of Severus; I should say a copy of some fairer and earlier original. But it is very graceful——”

“A Venus?”

“No. A Feronia, I think, unquestionably. I daresay it will be called a Venus; everything is; it is the one name that ignorance has mastered; such is the power of beauty! Come up the hill to me to-morrow by the twentieth hour, and we will go together. It is a saint’s day; you cannot work, unless you would lose the shoes of Padre Trillo. They will not put it in-doors for a few days; there is no fear of rain, and it looks so well with the grapes and the olives about it. What a pity it is that marble discolours out of doors; it never looks so well as with a background of clouds and leaves. If the disputed *circumlitio* of the Greeks meant some manner of preserving statues from the influence of weather, as sometimes I used to think, the loss of the method should be even more la-

mented than it is. Farewell. What a noise your friend the smith is making! one forgives him for the sake of Lysippus; it is one of the few trades that remain masterful and poetic."

Therewith he went over the bridge to his house, where Giojà was working in the quiet afternoon hours, modelling from the round in clay, or drawing from the antique in charcoal, with that breadth and greatness of treatment which Maryx infused into all that he did and all whom he taught.

"Avoid mere prettiness as you would the plague," he would say always. "A sculptor means a hewer of the rocks, not a modeller in sugar."

With the morrow he and she and I went up the old Flaminian Way, past the place of Sulla's tomb, out into the open country towards Soracte, behind those spirited little black horses of his which scorned the shoes of smiths, and would scramble like goats up the steepest paved lanes of hilly Rome; the horses, whose likeness one sees on the old friezes chiselled in

the days when the horse was in a manner a free creature, and not the mere hapless piece of mechanism to which centuries of harness and stall-life have now reduced him.

The villa of Hilarion was vast as a king's palace, and almost as full of magnificence and profusion ; it was always kept ready for him ; there were many years when he never went near it ; there were other years when he lived there all the four seasons through ; in these painted marble halls, brilliant with Giulio Romano's bold colours, where the windows opened on the great avenues of cedar and evergreen oak, arching like cloisters on all sides to show some temple, lake, or statue, it was easy to believe that one was still in the era of magnificent Leo, or that luxurious Lucrezia might have been coming thither on her palfrey, or the Vatican court floating up Tiber in its barges with Bernardo Accolti rhyming his madrigals and sonnets to the rhythm of the oars.

The statue found that morning was left lying on the turf a little way from where it had been discovered, away from the house under the

vines and olives, where the farms began and the gardens ended.

Oxen had ploughed above it for many a century, and many a soldier tramped to war, yet the marble was uninjured, save that the left arm was missing. It was lovely, and doubtless some copy of a Greek original adapted to a Latin divinity.

Maryx examined it long and lovingly, and decided that it was of workmanship not later than the time of Adrian, and that it was a Feronia and not a Flora, as the master of the works had at first considered it to be, from the heavy wreath of various blossoms and leaves that crowned the head; and he gave us many a learned reason why it was the younger divinity that "loved garlands" rather than the greater goddess of all things that flowered and brought forth.

It was a Feronia, no doubt, said Maryx.

The Romans had loved Feronia, and had always given her beautiful festivals, not so licentious as the Floralia or the Liberalia, with which they had possessed much in common, however.

She had been an Etrurian and Volscian deity, and was always dearer to the Sabine than to the Latin. She had had of old her chief temple at the foot of Soracte ; Hannibal's soldiers had violated her shrine ; before that she had been the cause of war between the Romans and the Sabines ; she had been always a most beautiful though not supreme goddess, no doubt sprung from the same myth as Persephone at the beginning of time ; she had had always most lovely attributes ; wells and fountains had been consecrated to her ; she had been in especial the deity of freed men ; “bene-meriti servi sedeant, surgent liberi ” had been the inscription on her altars ; her feasts had been all in the summer ; they had used to invoke her with Apollo Soranus ; she had clearly sprung from the Demeter legend as Libera did ; what a pity that the freedmen had mostly been but panders and fawning sycophants, and bloated moneymakers ; the fancy was so fine ; that gift of liberty in the temples of flowers :—so said Maryx, with much more that was worth hearing, as he sat on a block of tufa under an olive tree, beside the fair white Feronia who had been

under the earth a thousand years if one, more likely two, and still was none the worse.

There was a great charm in hearing Maryx talk; his very voice was eloquence, and his fancy discursive, and his learning vast in all that belonged to the arts or to their history.

Giojà listened to him with a charmed delight. He was her beloved master.

The light fell through the silver leaves on to the marble in the grass: beyond the olives and the vines were the deeper green and purple shadows of great pine woods; through an opening there was the golden light which told that the city was shining in the sunset; behind us was sublime Soracte.

“How well it will be with them some day!” I thought, looking from the noble head of Maryx, lightened by the sunlight that fell through the olive boughs to the face of my Ariadnê, as it bloomed with youth and the freshness of air, and the warmth of high and tender thoughts. “How well it will be!” I thought, and was glad that I had meddled with that dread blind goddess who was throned of old upon Præneste.

There came a step through the olives, and over the grass to the place where we sat. Palès sprang from her rest in a delirium of rapture.

“Which is the found Feronia?” said Hilarion, as he looked from the statue to the girl. “Since when have your marbles breathed, Maryx? It is true, they always looked as though they did so.”

We were too surprised to speak. No one had had any notice of his return. But then he never wrote to any living soul, and seldom was certain of his own moods one hour on another.

“Is there no welcome for me?” he said, with his eyes still resting wonderingly on Giojà.

She had risen, and was looking at him with a slow startled recollection and gladness waking on her face.

“You are the Apollo Citharædus,” she said, and paused in a little awe.

“I am a graceless singer of sad songs,” said Hilarion, with a smile. “Have they been kind

enough to make you think of me, though I was unknown? I said I should return when a fairer nymph than my marble Canens should be released from earth. I have kept my word, and I find Daïla thrice blessed."

Then he threw himself on the grass between her and the marble Feronia.

We began to tell him something both of her and of the statue.

"Tell me nothing," said Hilarion. "Let us cheat ourselves. We are living under Augustus. There is no shadow of the cross on the world yet. The Feronia will be raised on her altar to-morrow. We shall have the races with the rose-crowned boys, that symbolize the swiftness of time and the vainness of pleasure. We do not believe in her nor in anything very much. The temper that comes with Cæsarism has made us mockers; but we keep the grace of the old faiths about us. Let us cheat ourselves—no one is happy except in delusion; and we will send for Tibullus to supper."

Giojà all the while was looking at him with grave soft eyes, still wondering. No woman

ever looked at him once only; and to her he was the Apollo Citharædus.

“The rose-crowned boys raced for Flora,” said Maryx. “But if you choose to worship your Feronia with roses or anything else, who shall prevent you?—she is yours.”

“No, she is yours. You found her, Maryx.”

“Perhaps. But you own her.”

“What! because she lies on my earth, and lay under it? That is no such title as yours, who could call as fair as she any day out of a block of stone. Take her, and set her in your atrium. It is not Feronia that I am disposed to envy you.”

He looked towards Giojà, as he leaned near her on his elbow, full length on the grass.

Maryx understood.

“You mistake, my friend,” he said, quickly, with a little frown. “There may be Divæ Virgines unpolluted with any adoration.”

“Even of the little red dogs that were sacrificed in the Robigalia to avert the canicular blight?” said Hilarion, listlessly, still gazing at the face near him.

He too understood ; but he did not believe.

“ Perhaps those red dogs suggested for later legends the red mouse—who knows ? ”

“ The red mouse has never entered where you look,” said Maryx.

Giojà listened : she did not understand. She seldom asked questions. She studied, and she thought. “ Few women can be silent and let God speak.” She could be so. As her recompense she heard beautiful things ; and missed many bad ones.

Hilarion laughed.

“ Sculptors are always passionless,” he said. “ I wonder why there are no stories of them as there are of poets and of painters. They have no Laïs and no Laura—at least, for history. I suppose the marble chills you all.”

“ Do you call Laïs at the well, and Laura at the mass, passion ? ” said Maryx, with a little contempt.

“ There are few things in tradition prettier than the meeting of Apelles and Laïs upon Akrokorinth,” said Hilarion, not heeding. “ I wonder no artist has made it his subject. But

people are always confounding her with the too famous or infamous Laïs of Alkibiades, which is a pity. Apelles' treasure-trove was killed for her surpassing beauty by the jealousy of woman on the steps of the temple of Aphrodite, before she had had very many years to profit by his teaching."

"She was not much loss," said Maryx. "She left the well too willingly. So you care little for your Feronia? Well, it is not of the best epoch. In her time they had already begun to manufacture statues; to make the figures of gods and emperors, and await orders what heads to affix to them. When Christianity killed sculpture, after all she did not strangle a muse, but a mechanical toy."

"A muse cannot be strangled; she may be starved. When Christianity crushed the mechanism of Art, the Muses veiled themselves, and hid from men; but they lived, and can be found again. You know their dwelling-place."

"They turn their faces from me oftener than you think," said Maryx, with a sigh. "How

should we have great Art in our day? We have no faith. Belief of some sort is the life-blood of Art. When Athene and Zeus ceased to excite any veneration in the minds of men, sculpture and architecture both lost their greatness. When the Madonna and her son lost that mystery and divinity, which for the simple minds of the early painters they possessed, the soul went out of canvas and of wood. When we carve a Venus now, she is but a light woman; when we paint a Jesus now, it is but a little suckling, or a sorrowful prisoner. We want a great inspiration. We ought to find it in the things that are really beautiful, but we are not sure enough, perhaps, what is so. What does dominate us is a passion for nature; for the sea, for the sky, for the mountain, for the forest, for the evening storm, for the break of day. Perhaps when we are thoroughly steeped in this we shall reach greatness once more. But the artificiality of all modern life is against it; so is its cynicism. Sadness and sarcasm make a great Lucretius as a great Juvenal, and scorn makes a strong Aristophanes; but they do not make a Praxiteles

and an Apelles; they do not even make a Raffaele, or a Flaxman."

"Even!"

"Yes, even. Raffaele was the most wondrous draughtsman, and the sweetest of all living poems; but there have been painters far higher than he in vision and far nobler in grasp. Really, looking into them, his pictures say very little, almost nothing. It is his perfect life that dazzles us; it is so perfect—cradled in that old eyrie of Urbino, and dropping in its bloom like a pomegranate flower, mourned by the whole of Rome. Nothing could be lovelier than such a life—save such a death!"

"No. 'Celui qui a passé par la porte de la désillusion est mort deux fois.' Raffaele alone of all men that have ever lived never passed that fatal door of disenchantment. Yet I am not sure that Domenichino was not a truer artist at heart. Domenichino lived under a continued shadow of pain and calumny, but in that stormy twilight he saw great visions, though he could ill embody them."

"And they broke his heart amongst them. It

is very sad always to be born for Art where Art is decaying and dying: Raffaele must have seen that the miraculous gourd of the Renaissance was withering, but he does not seem to have sorrowed."

"We, ourselves, are only eating the stalk of the gourd now: do we suffer?"

"I think we do. All that we create that is worth anything—it is not much that is so—is marked out by two things, melancholy and doubt. Not a puerile melancholy nor an insolent doubt, but the immeasurable dreariness of a soul that is adrift like a rudderless ship on a unknown sea. There never was any age so sad at heart as ours."

"Is that a praise or a reproach?"

"Neither. Only a fact."

"It at least shows we have no vanity. We have ceased to believe ourselves the care of gods, the heirs of eternity. We know ourselves to be only motes upon the rays of a light which is but made of mere empty gases as the marsh lights are!"

"And that is not the temper which conceives

greatly or produces greatly. If Alexander had believed himself a bubble of gas instead of the son of a god, he would not have changed the face of the world. Negation cannot be the parent of heroism, though it will produce an indifference that counterfeits it not ill, since Petronius here died quite as serenely as ever did the martyrs of the church."

"You would argue then that superstition is the soul of the hero and of the artist! A sorry conclusion."

"Faith is—of some sort. It matters little whether it be in divinity or humanity. The worst fault of the arts now is that they have not even faith in themselves. Take my own: it has lost belief in its own power to charm. Falconet,—who, nevertheless, was a clever man, and more right, perhaps, about Michael Angelo than we like to allow,—Falconet exactly struck the death-note of the plastic arts (though he meant praise), when he said, 'our marbles have *almost* colour.' That is just where we err. We are incessantly striving to make Sculpture at once a romance writer and a painter, and of course she

loses all dignity, and does but seem the jay in borrowed plumes of sable. There is no greater sign of the weakness and feverishness of the arts in our day than the way in which they all borrow one from another, mistrusting their own isolated force: the musicians with their compositions in chiar-oscuro, the painters with their symphonies in red and grey, the poets with their studies in sepia, or their motives in brown and white;—it is all false and unreal, sickly and borrowed, and sculpture does not escape the infection. Conceits are altogether out of keeping with marble. They suit a cabinet painting or a piece of china. Bernini was the first to show the disease when he veiled the head of his Nile to indicate that its source was unknown!—a costume-designer's trick for a carnival masquerade.”

“Bernini could not be better than that; he had to please Gregory and Louis XIV. Genius cannot escape the taint of its time more than a child the influence of its begetting. Augustus could have Horace and Ovid; he could never have had Homer and Milton.”

“I do not think with you. Talent takes the

mark of its generation; genius stamps its time with its own impression. Virgil had the sentiment of an united Italy. But then there is so much talent and so little genius at any epoch ! ”

“ Or in any art ; and what there is, is dwarfed and cramped by the manner and necessities of modern life. Only think of the Lesbian or Theban poets reciting strophe and antistrophe by moonlight under the cypress trees, crowned with the olive of victory, and with a whole nation listening in rapture underneath the stars. Now-a-days Pindar or Myrnedes or Sappho could only print a book, and ‘ those who have failed in literature and art ’ would be free to rate, and rail, and lie about them in print, likewise.”

“ There are two sides to that. For one, I think that there is something even finer than the crowds and the olive wreath in the silence and solitude in which a man may work now, without a sign, until his thoughts go out like a flock of birds suddenly set free, over all lands, and to all peoples, finding welcome and bearing seed to the farthest and the lowliest corners of the earth. Besides, people were not so very different then ;

critics snarled and sneered till victims hanged themselves for sorrow, and 'sad and tender songs were sold with silvered faces.' We have Pindar's and Plato's own lament for it. No, were I a poet, I would be content with the present time. Instead of Ægina and Hymettus, you have the whole world."

"And were I a sculptor I would be content. Instead of Olympus, you have a complete knowledge of comparative anatomy! But now make me more known to your living statue there; she, I see, is like Sappho, 'a nursling of the Graces and Persuasion,'—only she is so silent."

"She is thinking of your songs which have silvered faces, but are not written for gold," said Maryx. "Giojà, my dear, look up and speak."

She lifted her beautiful serious eyes to Hilarion.

Of old, he to whom Phœbus taught the arts of song, learned also the arts of magic and of healing. Hilarion had learned the magic, but how to heal he had never cared to ask Phœbus.

The sun had set, and there came cold winds from Soracte, and mists from the sea.

“It grows chilly,” said Hilarion. “Let us go indoors. There are roses there, and something to drink and eat, and there is a boy who plays the flute not ill—I brought him with me. The flute is almost as sweet as a nightingale when you shut the player from sight.”

He turned to her as became his right, for it was he who was master of Daila:—not we. Giojà rose from beside the goddess of freedmen, and, still silent and almost shy, went with him.

I thought of the girl at the well on Akrokorinth, that he had spoken of, whom Apelles found drawing water, and whom he led in with the earthen aryballos on her pretty head to the banquet of the painters in the city of fair women.

“Do you laugh because of her blushes?” said Apelles. “Do not fear, I will make her as skilled on all the ways of love as any one of them that goes up, perfumed and curled, in her tunic of gauze, to worship Aphrodite Meloënis.”

Not that I was afraid.

And besides, as Maryx had said, since Laïs left the well so willingly she was but little loss. No doubt if Apelles had not passed that way, she

would have tired of drawing water, and would have envied those young slaves whom the ship by the quays brought to furnish the hosts of pleasure, and would have gone up of her own will to worship Aphrodite in the sweet secret cypress forest.

And, yet again, besides this, I was sure, that my seaborn Ariadnê had nothing of either Laïs in her.

Nevertheless, I wished Hilarion had not returned, and I was glad that the night closing in let us hear but little of the flute, and see only the first freshness of the roses. He let us go with many expressions of regret, and with a smile.

By some miracle he had no women with him, there, and had brought no one but his boy flute-player.

Giojà was still more silent than usual.

"What poems does he write?" she asked me once, in the darkness of the stairs as I took her to her door.

"He writes as Heine says that Aristophanes did," I answered her. "The singing of the

nightingales is spoilt by the chattering of the apes that lodge in the blossoming tree of his fancy."

"Will you give them to me to read?"

"You cannot read his tongue."

"I can learn. Why does he let the apes come upon his trees?"

"Heine would say because the tree was set in the darksome swamp of *Weltvernichtungsidee*. There is a long word for you that you cannot translate. Not that he is the least like Aristophanes. The apes on Hilarion's tree never laugh; they mock. But to do him justice, his nightingales are sweet and sad as Aedón herself—who, by the bye, had murder on her soul. Good night, my dear. Palès is quite tired; so must you be."

"Could no one persuade him to send the apes away?"

She had her hand on the latch of the door. The old, dim lamp she carried shone upon her face.

"When a man has once kept company with such apes as these, it is hard for him to forego them," I said to her. "And it is best not to

meddle with his taste ; he has his hours for the nightingales. Good night, my dear."

" Good night."

She went within and dreamt, I fear, of Apollo Soranus with the face of Hilarion, of the " sweet glad angels of the spring," that sang of heaven, and of apes and snakes out of Soracte's sacred caverns that hissed and drowned the song.

I had not done very wisely. I had made her pity him, with a soft vague pity, all the tenderer because she could not in the most distant way understand the disease from which he suffered ; the moral disease of Apollo Soranus, who, through his sweet music, with the celestial rays above his head, yet breathed miasmatic vapours upon men, and bade them sin and die.





CHAPTER II.



NEXT day I had divers errands to execute, and shoes to take home; amongst them, I went to the old Palazzo Spada, having some boots of a custodian there, and looked in for the five hundredth time at Pompey's statue, which always seduces one to stand and think, remembering what blood was once set flowing at its feet.

If Cæsar had not gone out that day, but had hearkened to the warning of Calpurnia's dream, would the fate and the face of the world have been very much changed after all? Probably not: for, any way, when his death should have come, Octavius would have succeeded him. Augustus found Rome brick and left it marble—perhaps, though there was a deal of brick under-

neath his marble. But he found men virile and left them venal: and the world is still eating the lotus seeds that he sowed broadcast.

Liberty and the old wooden Ovilia, like a sheep-pen, was better than the ornamental and stately Septa of Agrippa, with liberty a laughing-stock, and manliness sunk in the laps of courtezans and the couches of slaves.

Thinking of Cæsar and Cæsarism—which never will thoroughly pass off the earth, because it is safe-rooted in the chronic cowardice and indolence and need of leadership ingrained in human nature—I crossed the Square of Capo di Ferro, and passing an arched kitchen where they were baking loaves and pastries, which they sold just outside it on the pavement, I heard the master-baker beating and belabouring a little baker-boy.

I always rescue little cook-boys for sake of Golden Claude, and I went in and freed the child by a few reasonable words, and more strongly reasoning pence. One may be a genius and yet burn a biscuit. Saxon Alfred did, who was here too in Rome, you know, a fair-haired

seven-year-old child. I wish Julius and Bramante had left the old basilica standing, if only for sake of that pretty northern boy, who came so far on pilgrimage from the Barbarian isle.

I went along the dirty vegetable market of the Campo dei Fiori, where once the flames bore "to those worlds which he had imagined," the great master of Free Thought. I walked on, hearing still my little baker-boy's sobs of gratitude, and thinking of Claude Lorraine, and what an odd thing it was that a creature too stupid to slip a cake properly into an oven, and too awkward to put it properly on a plate when baked, should have had the sense of the sunset and the soul of the sunrise in him as he had !

It is very wonderful ; for, say what you like, a great painter he is, though artificial, and if anything would make one hate a classic temple he would do it, but a great painter, beyond doubt, and one who would not have been even artificial if he would but have worked out of doors ; but though he would sit for hours out of doors, he would always go within to paint, which is what spoilt him.

Thinking of Claude and of that fugitive golden glow, which he who could not brown a biscuit could imprison on his canvas, I walked across the Field of the Flowers, where not a flower grows, so much death has it seen and still does see ; and my thoughts strayed away to the time when on its stones a grocer's lad recited and improvised there to an enraptured throng, and Hellenic scholars metamorphosed his name to Metastasio.

“Dreaming by daylight, Crispino ?” said a voice I knew. “But that you always do. Well, you are right, for dreams are the best part of life.”

It was the voice of Hilarion. He was coming across the square, with his calm smile in his eyes that had always a little mockery in them ; an indulgent mockery, for human nature indeed was a very poor thing in his sight, but then he admitted that was not its own fault.

He greeted me in kindly manner, and turned and walked beside me. He had none of the pride which would have moved some men to be ashamed at being seen with an old cobbler with

a leather apron twisted up about his loins. Indeed, he had too much pride for any such poor sentiment; what he chose to do was his own law and other people's, or if it were not other people's it ought to be so:—besides, Hilarion, practically the most tyrannical of masters, was theoretically the most democratic of thinkers. In his eyes all men were equal—in littleness of worth.

How handsome he was as he came across the old desolate place with the shadows of the huge Cancelleria and of the granite colonnades from the Theatre of Pompey falling sombrely across his path!—almost more so than when I had first seen his face as a boy on the night that his light o' love died.

How handsome he was!—one could not but feel it as one feels the beauty of a roebuck, of a diamond, of a palm-tree, of a statue, of a summer night. It was real beauty, mournful and tender, but not emasculated; he had the form of the disc-thrower in the Vatican, and the face of my Borghese Bacco. I could understand how women loved Hilarion, just because he looked at them,

just because they could not help it. I did the same, though there were things and thoughts I hated in him, and times when I fancied it might be possible for one to kill him—and do well.

“If you had really loved one woman,”—I had sometimes said to him. And he had smiled.

“Women are best in numbers. Who makes a pasty with one truffle?”

That was all he knew. The poet who would write of Sappho and of Sospitra and of the great passion in the words that burn, knew no more of it than a man moulding casts in plaster here knows of the art of Pheidias or of the face of the bronze Athene.

To Hilarion love was an appetite, an animal pleasure—and no more.

Women were soft pretty brutes like panthers, that one stroked with the more pleasure because of the peril in their velvet paws. They were all like Lilas to him, some lower some higher, but no more worth to weep over when lost. So he said in his delicate, bitter, amorous, cruel voice:—and so he said in his heart.

“Who is she?” he asked of me without

preface, moving beside me across the cabbage-strewn stones of the Campo dei Fiori.

“ Maryx told you,” I answered him.

“ Of course he did not tell the truth. How could he before her? Tell me their story.”

“ There is no other to tell, and Maryx never lies. It is not what you think. She learns with him. No more. For myself ——”

Then I told him how I had found her coming travel-worn and weary from the sea.

“ It is very pretty,” he said when I had ended. “ And Maryx and you are good enough for anything:—even to play the part of the divine Lupercus to such a lamb! ”

There was more of sincerity than sarcasm in his words, yet there was enough of the latter to anger me.

“ It does not need much virtue,” I said, roughly, “ still less divinity, to act like decent men.”

“ Lupercus objected to the wolf, but never to the Flamen’s fire and knife,” said Hilarion, with a little laugh at my irritation. “ You have given her over to the Flamen, since you have devoted

her to art. Art for a woman ! and that insatiable art too ! Think of Properzia of Bologna."

" It was not art that killed Properzia. It was the love, or rather the cruelty of man. Do you stay long this winter ? "

" My dear Lupercus, I do not know. Life loses something—spent out of Rome. It is only here that each day holds for us two thousand years. Now tell me all you have done besides finding an Ariadnê ?—not that the Borghese bust is an Ariadnê, but that does not matter at all—what palimpsests have you lighted on ?—what early Boccaccio or black-letter St. Jerome have you picked up for a drink of wine ?—what mural paintings have you stumbled on through a hole in the grass that Palès made after a rat ?—what ivory pyx beyond price, have you found an old woman keeping her pills or her pins in ? And to think there are people in the world who do not care for a pyx or a palimpsest ! And to think that learning has ever been figured as a serious and wearisome thing ! As if there were any other thing that could make life one half so entertaining ! What else can paint a whole teeming Agora on the dull face

of a single old coin, and embalm a whole nation's faith in a mere branch of rosemary? Do you not pity from your soul the poor folks to whom the palimpsest is only an old scrawled scroll, and the pyx a box of bone? And then learning is the only pleasure that one cannot exhaust! It is the deep sea that the child showed St. Augustine. The deepest waders amongst us touch scarcely more than its surf. If love were but like learning! ——"

"What has become of Neria?"

Neria was the dark-browed singer who had left Rome with him.

"Neria?—her temper was insupportable, or mine was, I have forgotten which. Neria was the mistress of Mars; I am not Mars, and I like peace."

"That is, you like to be inconstant without being reproached for it."

"Perhaps. All men do, I suppose. Reproaches are an error: when they begin to reproach me I give them something that they wish for; very much as the Romans sacrificed the *porca præsentanea*, when they buried a dead body; and

then I see them no more. There are two women that I should have liked to have known; they are the second Faustina and S. Elizabeth of Hungary. They are the most singular women that ever lived, and the most unlike to each other that the world ever saw."

"Which would keep you longest?"

"Faustina no doubt: innocent women are always forsaken. One is too sure of them."

And with that terrible truth he paused by an old stall in the street, allured by the glimmer of an onyx, on which was carved the veiled figure of Pudicitia, with one hand hidden in her robe.

Some Roman lover had had it engraved for his bride, I dare say; some soft serious creature who put all her soul into the *ubi tu Gaius, ego Gaia*, when she crossed his threshold; and lived at home, and never opened her doors to the roysterers of the Bona Dea in the December nights, and never donned a transparent tunic and drank the philtres of the East, and spent all his substance in love-gifts and license when all the town was shouting *Io Saturnalia*, but went in quiet and humility to

her own altar, and prayed for her unborn child to mother Ops and Spes. There were such women even in Cæsarean Rome. There are such women always everywhere—lest men should quite despair.

“Poor Pudicitia! Perhaps this was a signet stone of one of the Agrippinas,” said Hilarion, with a little laugh, buying the seal. “It was a fashion to salute the foulest empresses in her name. There are many fashions of old Rome we cling to still. Do you remember that the first statue of Modesty, the veiled one of the Forum Boarium, was always called by the people the statue of Fortune? It may serve as a pretty enough allegory that the good fortune of a nation does lie in the chastity of its women, though I do not suppose that the Romans meant that. I wonder what other statues I shall find at Daïla. I shall give myself up for awhile to Daïla. If one could only discover the Kypris Anadyomene! But it never came into Italy. What would you like the best if you could choose of all the lost treasures of the world? I think I would have that copy of the Iliad corrected by Aristotle, that Alexander

always carried about with him shut in its golden box."

"Or the famous three lines that Apelles and Protogenes drew — if it were only to stop the eternal squabbling of artists about it."

"Yes, Pliny does not tell one enough, though he saw it himself, so he might have said more. I would sooner, perhaps, have the portrait of Kampaspe, or the Kypris, or the Zeus. Not but what, though Maryx would call it a heresy, I always fancy myself that those chryselephantine and polythitic statues, with their eyes of precious stones, must have been in reality very ugly. I would rather have the lost Lycurgeia or the Montefeltro Menander, or the missing books of Tacitus, or that history of Etruria which Claudius wrote; because he was a scholar, you know, though an imbecile in other things, and it might have given us the key to the language. Perhaps, though, better than all, I would choose in a heap all those lovely pagan things that Savonarola and his boys burnt on Palm Sunday, the Petrarch with the illuminated miniatures included. When

one thinks of all those things it does really seem just that he was burnt himself! Indeed, why does the world make such a lament over his burning? It does not care for Giordano Bruno's, who perished on this very spot we are crossing. Yet Giordano Bruno was far the finer man of the two. It required a thousandfold more courage to refuse the crucifix than to raise it, in those days. Savonarola was a narrow ascetic, who preached the miserly creeds that have sheared the earth bare of all beauty. Yes, when one thinks of all the classic marbles and erotic pictures and priceless relics of the early arts that his fanaticism lost to us for ever, one cannot but feel that though the world sees but little fair measure, it did see some for once, when the pile was lit for the preacher. Not that anybody meant to be just in burning him; men always stumble on justice by the merest accident when they do chance to arrive at it at all."

So he talked, passing over the Campo dei Fiori, talked discursively, as his habit was, of all things relevant and irrelevant, as the fancy occurred to him.

Then he left me and went into a dark doorway, to see some artist, as he said.

It was quite evening when my errands were all done, and I got home again to Palès and the fountain in the wall; for one cannot walk straightly in Rome; if you have brains and eyes, nohow will your feet carry you dully on your proper road; there will be always some old angle of acanthus cornice, some colossal porphyry fragment, some memory of monastic legend or of pagan feast; some fancy that here stood such a temple, or there lived such a poet; some marble seen ten thousand times and never seen enough, some church-doors set wide open with the torches and the jewels and the white robes gleaming in the dusk, some palm-tree leaning over a high palace-wall that may have come from Asia with the worship of Sol Invictus and Astarte, when Orontes overflowed into Tiber:—always something to turn aside for and linger over, and set one wondering and sighing; for although Hilarion is right, that learning is the only pleasure of which there is no surfeit, and which lends a lovely light to all the darkest corners where we

walk, yet all our choicest knowledge is at best but a mitigated ignorance.

The wisest men I have ever known have always been the first to say so. Of course I cannot judge myself, having only picked up a little knowledge, as poor travellers see beautiful things by looking in through such doors and gates as stand open along the wayside.

It was quite evening when I got back to the barking of Palès and the singing of my Faun ; a good woman at a fruit-stall had given me some prickly pears and pomegranates, and I thought I would take them to Giojà ; I had seldom much to give, and I knew she was always at home at this hour, for she went to bed with the birds and rose with them.

When I climbed the steep stairs and opened her door, her lamp was burning, but the window was opened, and left in sight the sky, still tinged with the pale primrose light of the dead day, with here and there the stars already out. She had some great books before her on the table, and was leaning her arms upon them, and her cheeks upon her hands ; her face was upturned,

the light of the lamp fell on it; Hilarion was leaning against the casement, and was talking to her.

I felt angry, which was foolish; and as though some wrong were done to me and Maryx, which was more foolish still.

“Dear Crispin, I have been expecting you an hour,” said he; and that I felt was a lie, for he had known where I had been going, and knew my dilatory and divergent ways of going anywhere. There were some great lilies and rose-red cactus flowers, and other blossoms very rare at that time of the year; of course he had brought them there. Not that there was any harm in that.

“She is perfect, your Ariadnê,” he said, as we went down awhile later into the street together.

“At least she will be. At present she is not fairly awake. She has her soul shut in her marbles. Has Maryx no eyes?”

“Maryx has honour.”

Hilarion laughed a little.

“Dear Lupercus, how grave you are! So you have given her your room, and your

Hermès, and all your treasures? You never told me that."

"How did you find her, then?"

"Oh, that was easy enough. Can you live at a street corner and hope to keep a secret? She has really genius. It is a pity."

"Why? since it is all she has?"

"Is it all? Maryx and you are as cruel as the Pontifex Maximus when the fires were let out. Art for a woman is as sad as the temple of Vesta. To gather the sacred grain, and draw the sacred water, and guard the sacred flame—that was not worth one little hour of joy. The Romans knew that. Their Venus Felix had always a child in her arms."

Then he took his horse which waited there, and went away through the dark to Daïla. I went back for a moment.

"What do you think of him?" I asked her.

She hesitated a moment, and it seemed to me that she coloured a little.

"He is beautiful," she said, softly: sculptor-like, form was what she thought of first.

"The most beautiful man the world ever saw,

was Heliogabalus," I said to her. "And perhaps the next most beautiful was St. Just."

She looked at me in surprise, her hands amongst the lilies and cactus flowers.

"I thought he was your friend?"

I felt the rebuke, and was ashamed.

"He is very great in the world, is he not?" she asked.

"Yes, in a way. It is not Maryx's way. Hilarion's fame is like that cactus flower, glorious, brilliant, lustrous, born of a barren stem, and without fruit; the fame of words that burn but do not illumine."

She put the cactus blossoms together tenderly.

"He says beautiful things, and I think he is not happy. Look, did you ever see such flowers even here? Maryx says one must never attempt flowers in marble. That it is absurd, as it would be to try and reproduce the dew or the waves. Otherwise, one might make a head of the Dea Syria, crowned with those cacti ——"

"Yes. They would be appropriate symbols for the religion that embodied the corruption of Rome."

I was angry, unwisely so; the cacti were to me symbols of corruption.

She had left the flowers and was drawing. Maryx had taught her that design must underlie all great sculpture, as the skeleton underlies the beauty of human or animal form, and until she could satisfy him with the chalk he had always refused to trust her with the clay. Hence her designs were fine and firm and fearless.

“Tell me all you know of him,” she said; “‘Hilarion?’ What country is that name? Hilarion was a saint in the desert, you know.”

I would not answer her at first, but she would not be denied; she had a stubborn resoluteness under her soft and serious ways. I told her reluctantly about him; it was not very much that I knew that was fit for her ears, but I had always had a love for him, and he had done me and others grateful and gracious things: of those I spoke, in justice to him, knowing I had been churlish and unfair. Then, at her entreaties, which I never could well withstand, I went to an old credenza against the wall, where I kept some few

books, black-letter and otherwise, and found a volume he had written, and read to her two or three of his poems, translating them as I went, though I felt that I spoiled sadly the languid and melodious dithyrambics of his genius.

She listened in perfect silence, drawing with her charcoal and chalk all the while by the light of the lamp, under the statue of Hermès.

At length I shut up the book, angry with myself for having given in to her.

“It is getting late—at least late for you. Put up your work, my dear,” I said to her, and looked at what she was doing.

She had drawn the head of Hilarion in as perfect a likeness as it was possible to see, and had crowned it with the cactus flowers like a Syrian god.

“It would do for an Antinous; and he was a slave and a suicide,” I said, venomously, for I would not admit the excellence of the work or its grace.

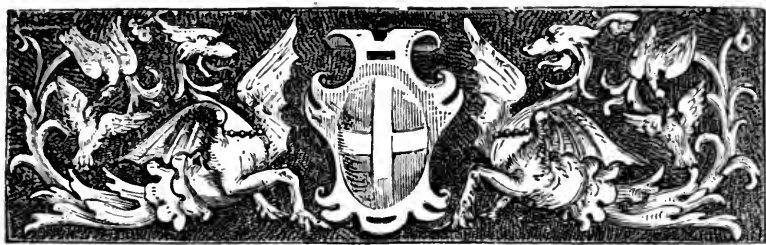
“Oh no,” she said, lifting the lamp to light me to the door. “It would do for an Agathon: I should think he is like Agathon. It was so

good of you to read me his songs. You will read me some more, to-morrow ? ”

What other girl or woman in the whole world would have thought of Agathon of Athens as a likeness for him ;—of him of the “ Flower,” and of the “ Symposium,” whom all men united to call “ the beautiful ! ”

I had been a fool, I said to myself, stumbling down the dark stairs to see that my stall was safe. Palès woke out of her sleep in the straw, and told me that I had been a fool, and the Faun in the fountain was silent.





CHAPTER III.

HILARION had asked me to breakfast with him on the following day. I went, walking across the Campagna in the tracks between the honeysuckle banks, where the ox-carts go. The earth is most beautiful at dawn, but so very few people see it, and the few that do are almost all of them labourers, whose eyes have no sight for that wonderful peace, and coolness, and unspeakable sense of rest and hope which lie like a blessing on the land. I think if people oftener saw the break of day, they would vow oftener to keep that dawning day holy, and would not so often let its fair hours drift away with nothing done, that were not best left undone.

I had the mutilated volume from the Aldus press in my pocket for him, for he loved such things, and had a fine knowledge of them; the thyme was sweet under my feet; the goats plucked at the long creepers in the broken arches of the aqueduct; big oxen with wide-branching horns passed, ringing the bells about their necks; the sun rose red; birds sang in the low clumps of bearberry and hawthorn; little field-mice scudded before my steps, where the wheels of Sulla's triumphal chariot once had rolled; and Palès chased a rat where gens on gens of the great Roman world lay buried root and branch.

But I could enjoy but little of it. I felt uneasy, and in a vague alarm.

I found him in the great walled garden that lay behind his villa.

He was lying at full length in a hammock of silk netting, that swung between magnolia stems; and his flute-boy was playing, seated in the grass. There was a delicious calm about the place; the autumnal roses were all in bloom, and thickets of the Chinese olive

scented the air like the incense of some Indian god's temple.

There was a high wall near, covered with peach-trees, and topped with wistaria and valerian, and the handsome wild caperplant; and against the wall stood rows of tall golden sunflowers late in their blooming; the sun they seldom could see for the wall, and it was pathetic always to me as the day wore on, to watch the poor stately amber heads turn straining to greet their god, and only meeting the stones and the cobwebs, and the peach-leaves of their inexorable barrier.

They were so like us!—straining after the light, and only finding bricks and gossamer and wasps'-nests! But the sunflowers never made mistakes as we do: they never took the broken edge of a glass bottle, or the glimmer of a stable lanthorn for the glory of Helios, and comforted themselves with it — as we can do.

“If this wall were mine, I should throw it down for their sakes,” I said to Hilarion; “though, to be sure, by the time it came down,

every poor helianthus would each be dead with frost."

"Would you sacrifice my peaches for those weeds? Crispin, you should have been born a poet. You are improvident enough for one. Taste those peaches. That one is the Magdelaine Blanche, and that yonder is the Pucelle de Malines. Are you learned in fruit? I am when I am in France. But here, you have no great gardening. Everything grows too easily. Your husbandry is like your brains! Will you hear the boy play?" said Hilarion, stretching himself at ease, amongst the bronze foliage of the magnolia boughs.

The boy played, and beautifully. Hilarion listened with closed eyes.

"If anything could make one believe in immortality it would be music," he said, when the lovely sounds had died away. "The best things I have ever written have been written when I heard music; thought should be like the stones of Thebes. How true in allegory all the old myths are!"

"Where did you find this lad?"

“ In a little island off Greece ; and I call him Amphion.”

“ And what will you do with him ? ”

“ Keep him while he pleases me.”

“ And after ? ”

“ I never think of ‘ after.’ It is the freedom from any obligation to think of it that is the real luxury of tolerable riches——”

“ Is the immediate moment sufficient ? ”

“ Perhaps not. But it is the best that one has. You do not choose your peaches well. Take that Téton de Vénus. Will Maryx be here to-day ? ”

“ I fancy not ; he is occupied on some great idea that is only in the clay.”

Hilarion smiled.

“ Or only in the flesh ? I wish it may be in the clay. All he does is great. He belongs to another time than ours. One fancies he must have sat at Homer’s feet. And he is so unspoiled by fame, and so indifferent to praise. Most of us who have any success in any art, are no wiser than Glaukus, who ran after a mouse and tumbled into a reservoir of honey ; and no god-endowed Polyeidus comes to shake *us* back into life and vigour.”

“Why do you talk so? You like your tank of honey; it is as sweet as a death ‘by Malnsey wine.’”

“Nevertheless, a death it is,” said Hilarion, with that contempt of himself and of his career which often moved him. “Perhaps we, too, began by running after a star instead of a mouse, but we stifle in the honey all the same; and the honey has always some stings of the makers left in it. The honey has been waiting for Maryx for twenty years, and he has never fallen into it. He is the strongest man I ever knew; praise has no power to intoxicate him, nor has censure any power to pain.”

“You are equally indifferent, I think.”

“Oh, no! I am weak enough to be glad that the foolish people come and pull the leaves of my myrtles, because they are my myrtles. Maryx cannot understand that. He is only glad when his own consciousness tells him his work is good. He does not care—I doubt whether he even knows—that a crowd in the streets looks after him. I think there is some charm in marble that keeps sculptors nobler than other men. The lives of

most of them have been singularly pure : look at Michelangelo's, Flaxman's, Canova's, Thorwaldsen's. By the way, I have had the Feronia put in the great hall ; she looks well there. They have come on some broken Etruscan pottery now, and are digging deeper ; very likely there are tombs underneath all. I will make an imaginary history of the spot, as the old Dominican, Fra Giovanni Nanni, did about Viterbo. Fancy walking all your life to and fro a cloister, with an old buried city for your Juliet ! No doubt he ended by believing his own lies : all dreamers do. I can never understand the complete annihilation of Etruria—can you ? It was so mighty a confederacy ; but then, after all, it was not so much obliterated as transmuted ; all that was Rome's best was Etrurian. Oh, you do not agree to that, because you believe in the Quirites. Well, they were a strong people, but they had no art except war. Let me get you your peach. You do not choose well. There is no time to eat fruit like the early morning—the birds know that. Only we spoil our palates with wine."

He filled my hands with peaches, and then would have me in to his breakfast-table, and seat me at it, having no sort of pride in that way, though much in others; and he praised my Aldus, and decided that it was no Lyons imitation, and talked of the early printers, and of rare copies from their presses, and of anything and everything under the sun in that light yet dreamy fashion, scholarly, and yet half flippant, which was natural to him, and which had a provoking charm of its own that seduced one into strange pleasure, yet irritated one, because the pleasure was after all so shifting and uncertain.

All the while he never once mentioned Giojà, and that alarmed me, because, of what he thought of most, Hilarion was a man to speak the least; for his manner was candid and careless, but his mind was neither.

At last, wisely or foolishly, I spoke of her.

“Have you seen the *Nausicaa*?” I asked him.

“No. A statue or a picture—new or old?”

“The last work of Maryx.”

“Oh! the *Nausicaa* that was in Paris in

spring? I forgot; of course. A most lovely figure. But I do not know but what the original is fairer still."

"You recognised her, then?"

"Beloved Lupercus, am I blind?"

It made me angry to be given that name; it seemed as if we all looked foolish in his eyes; and he was smiling as he spoke. Then, as simple people do blunderingly, and to their own hindrance, and the hurt of those they fain would serve, I took my heart in my hand, and laid it before Hilarion.

"You went to see her last night. I wish you would not. I read her your poems; I was a fool. She said you were like Agathon of Athens. What other girl could think of that? Can you understand? I am nothing to her; an old man that she asked her way of in the street the day she came to Rome, and old enough to be her grandsire and more; but in a way, you know, I seem too to belong to her, because I never can forget my dream in the Borghese, and it makes me anxious, because Love laughed—he always laughs when he has done his worst. And now

she is so utterly at peace; she wants for nothing; she is safe, and all is well. She has true genius too; you may see that in the things that she has done, and she is not like a girl; she has such knowledge of the past, and so much of the strength of art; if she be let alone she will be happy; she will be even great, I think, as that Properzia was we spoke of yesterday. You said that she sleeps still; yes, it is true, she sleeps and sees the gods. It were a sin to wake her. It were a cruelty, and who could measure all that she would lose? You have so much; you have all the world. I wish—I wish that you would let her alone; pass by; think of her as a child asleep, and nothing more, and not go near her.”

No doubt I spoke foolishly, but something in what I said touched him as he heard.

We were sitting in one of the great painted chambers, with the angelic hosts of Giulio Romano above our heads; the room was all in shadow, strong beams of light alone finding out here and there the riches it contained, the gems, the marbles, the mosaics, the bronzes, the vases;

and one of these rays of sun fell on the eyes of Hilarion; they were troubled and softened, and had a look of pity in them—almost of shame.

“I had no thought of it,” he said; and then I knew the error I had committed, and its folly.

“Perhaps it would be a sin,” he added, wearily. “Sometimes I think all life is, for that matter; though whether a sin of ours against the gods or of the gods against us, I never am sure. But I had no thought of it. I have entanglements enough—too many—and I do not know why you should be so anxious. What have I done? I took her a few flowers, and sat there for an hour; nothing more.”

“An hour has coloured eternity before now,” I murmured, knowing that I was unreasonable and unwise. “It is not what you have done; it is what you may do. She has no mother. She is quite alone.”

“She has Maryx!” said Hilarion, with a smile I did not like.

“You mistake—if that be what you think.”

He is her master; nothing more. I am stupid, I daresay, and may seem rude. But I am afraid:—you are capricious and inconstant.”

“Is that my fault?” he said, with a sigh—

“Hätte Gott mich anders gewollt,
Er hätte mich anders gebaut.”

“I do not see what any god can ever answer to that charge of Goethe’s. It is unanswerable. So you would have me leave your Ariadnê to Maryx?”

“No. I would have you leave her to her art and to herself. I do not think Maryx has any thoughts of her—of that kind. He cares only for her genius. He is a generous man, and good.”

“None better. Do not try to make him out a bloodless pedant.”

“A pedant!”

“Yes—to talk of his only seeing a muse in her! Maryx is a great man, and greater in nothing than in the manner of his life. But he is human, I suppose. When he modelled his Nausicaa, I doubt if he were half as much a sculptor as a lover. It is not ideal at all.

It is simply the girl herself. Maryx for once in his career only copied. He must know that."

"Could he have done better?"

"I do not say he could. I say when we are content only to reproduce a living thing, we are not artists any longer; we are lovers. If the contentment remain with us, Art is exiled."

"Is it in the interests of Art, then, that you are always faithless?"

"Am I so much worse than others?" he said, with a little amusement.

"You are more cruel," I said, simply.

He was silent. He knew that I was right.

"At least, you are cruel when you are tired; and you tire quickly," I said to him.

Hilarion laughed.

"Dear Crispin, you are bitter. I lay no claim to art. I am sure none of the scattered poets of the Anthology did, and if I be anything at all, I am as one of them. Only they lived in a happier time than I. So she called me Agathon? I do not think I ever had so pretty a flattery as that."

I could have bitten my tongue off, that I had told him : Agathon of the "Flower" and of the "Symposium !" Agathon of Athens, who was called pre-eminently "the beautiful !" Of course he was not likely to think the less of her, hearing that.

Palès, could she have spoken, would have had more sense than I.

"Her head is full of those people of the past," I said to him. "She lived all alone with the old books, and her father's talk of them. She is like Julian : always expecting to see the gods give signs. All the old time is to her as yesterday to others. It is a good in one way, and an evil in another. I do not think she sees the time she lives in, one whit more than, reading Virgil as she goes, she sees the throngs that bawl and pass her. Of course she may be run over, and be killed so, any day. Virgil will not save her."

"A curious danger ! Women do not often suffer much from love of the impersonal. Tell her that all that past she thinks so great, was only very like the Serapis, which men worshipped

so many ages in Theophilis, and which, when the soldiers struck it down at last, proved itself only a hollow colossus, with a colony of rats in its head, that scampered right and left. My friend, you drink nothing; taste that tokaï, it comes off my own vines by the Danube, and it is as soft as mother's milk. You have lost your mirth, Crispin. You should not have gone to sleep in the Cæsar's gallery; it has dazed you. You used to be as cheerful as any cricket in the corn."

"Would you promise me?" I said, and hesitated, for it seemed absurd to be so anxious about a danger that was yet unmenaced, and a thing that might be farthest from his thoughts.

Hilarion laughed, and rose.

"Oh, no! I never promise anything; I have not many scruples, but I do scruple about breaking my word, and so I never give it. Why should you be afraid of me? Maryx can hold his own; and I am not Agathon, as she would soon find out, if she saw me ever so little. I am not even young now!"

I was impatient and pained. He saw it,

and touched my shoulder with a kindly caressing gesture.

“Come and see some pictures I brought from France. They are landscapes. Maryx is right, that landscape painting is the only original form of painting that modern times can boast. It has not exhausted itself yet; it is capable of infinite development. Ruysdael, Rembrandt, and the rest, did great scenes, it is true, but it has been left to our painters to put soul into the sunshine of a cornfield, and suggest a whole life of labour in a dull evening sky hanging over a brown ploughed upland, with the horses going tired homeward, and one grey figure trudging after them, to the hut on the edge of the moor. Of course the modern fancy of making nature answer to all human moods, like an Eölian harp, is morbid and exaggerated, but it has a beauty in it, and a certain truth. Our tenderer souls take refuge in the country now, as they used to do in the cloister. Come and see my two Millets, and there are some slighter things by lesser men of his school, that are touching in their way; whom could your dear Claude ever touch?”

“ These pictures touch you : do your own peasants ever ? ”

“ No,” said Hilarion, “ I never think about them.”

And he never did. He had been brought up in the purest egotism. No one had even spoken to him of such things as the duties of fortune. He had been given the most careful culture of the mind and the body, and the graces of both : there his education had ended. That he ever did sweet and gracious things was due to the changeful impulses of his nature, and a certain disdain in him of all meanness, which at times became almost nobility. But that was all. And yet one loved him.

Love does not go by attributes, as is said in some comedy. It may be said out of a comedy, and in all sad seriousness. The best loved men and women have seldom been the best men or the best women.

He was summoned away by the arrival of some new treasures that he had bought on his way home ; and I went out and looked for the little flute-player, whom he called Amphion, and whom we had left sitting where the sunflowers were.

He was as lovely a youth as I have ever seen ; with a pale oval face and great eyes, that had the pathos and the meditation of the ox's in them ; you laugh—well, look straight into our oxen's eyes when next they meet you coming under the yoke across the fields, and say if all the unutterable sadness and wonder of existence are not in their lustrous gaze. “ Why are we here to suffer ? ” say those eyes ; the eternal question that all creation asks and asks in vain for aught that we can see.

Poor little lad ;—he was eighteen years old, perhaps, and had lived on one of those little islands of the *Ægean*, where the population is like one family, lives by the tillage of the earth, sleeps out of doors under the stars—men, women, and children—and is hardly altered at all since the ages of the “ Works and Days.”

He had run barefoot, leapt in the sea, mown the hay, slumbered on his bit of carpet under the broad shining skies, and been quite happy till a passer-by, touching at the little isle, had heard him play to his goats and for the maidens, and had spread gold before his dazzled parents, and

filled his head with dreams by a word or two, and carried him off to the great world of cities—there to be listened to awhile and then forgotten.

Hilarion was kind to him since his fancy was fresh; had him richly dressed in the national costume, and bade his people see that he had all he wanted; but no one except Hilarion could speak modern Greek, and the boy was very lonely.

He looked up at me with the timidity of a dog that had strayed. I myself could speak his tongue, though not with all the modern changes that Hilarion knew, and by little and little I gathered his short story from him.

He was not very happy. He sighed for his barefooted liberty; his little coracle on the sea; his mother's cool little dark hut with all the sun shut out, and no smell but the scent of the cow's breath and the dried grasses; but he did not dare to say so. He loved Hilarion, but he was very afraid of him.

“How long have you been with him?” I asked him, where he sat under the sunflowers.

“It was in the spring he came to the island.”

“ And you have seen wonderful places since then ? ”

“ Yes,” said the boy, wearily. “ Many crowds—crowds—crowds. Once some great person, an emperor, came to see him. He had me to play. It did not matter to me. I did not see the great people ; I saw the hayfields and the sea, and my white goats running to the honeysuckle. The emperor called me up and gave me a fine ring, and told me I should make my fortune—what is fortune ? In the island, he is rich who has six goats.”

“ I think you will be rich if you go back to your goats—caring for them.”

He did not understand.

“ They would not know me, perhaps,” he said, sadly. “ Praxides took them when I came away.”

“ Animals do not forget, my dear : that is a human privilege. And you would like to go back ? You are not very happy ? ”

He looked with a frightened glance right and left.

“ Yes : I would like to go back. But do not tell him. It is better here than it has been.

One is in the air. But in that great place they call Paris—it was like being shut in a golden box. I could not play at first, in all that noise and glitter; he was angry, I could not help it. But one day I heard the goats bleat in the street; I thought my heart would break; I ran and got the flute, it was a friend. Then the old songs and the dances came back to me.”

Poor little misnamed Amphion !

“ You cannot read ? ” I asked him. He shook his head.

“ Not even music ? ”

“ Do people read music ? I thought it was in the air.”

“ You must be lonely ? ”

“ Not when he remembers me. But he does not very often. And I should like to take these shoes off; I feel crippled——”

“ We are all crippled. And we have crippled even our horses to keep us company. Two or three thousand years ago in your country the horse was a beautiful, free, joyous thing: now it is an automaton; most of us are so. We call it civilization. The tighter the bonds the more

advanced are the wearers deemed. But your gold-laden jacket cannot be as easy as the old white shirt with the red sash."

The boy was silent, crushing a peach with his small dazzling teeth.

I was sorry for him.

Great singers end in millionaires: small singers end as clerks, and this poor, pretty, ill-called Amphion, who played so sweetly that it called tears to your eyes to hear him, had no genius, I thought, but only a beautiful instinct of innocent melody, as a bird has. And you could not make even a clerk of a little Greek, who sighed for the sea and the green grass, and the dances under the stars. He could not read, and he was ignorant of everything in the most absolute manner. Yet he interested me.

It is not what the human being knows, it is what he is, that is interesting.

I think it is Musset who says that the utterances of most men are very monotonous and much alike; it is what is in their heads that is never spoken which is the epic, the idyl, the threnody, the love-sonnet.

He goes on to say that every mortal carries about a world in himself, a world unknown, which lives and dies in silence ;—for what a solitude is every human soul !

It is of that inner world that I try to get a glimpse, though reluctantly I am bound to say that I do believe that it does not exist at all in many, and that not a few are as completely empty inside of them by nature as any pumpkin of which a little beggar boy has had the scooping.

“ Let him come home with me ; he is dull here ; there is not a creature that can talk to him,” I said to Hilarion a little later.

“ Of course, so he be here at night to play for the duchess.”

She, whom he spoke of, was a Roman, his reigning caprice of the hour.

“ He shall be here,” I said, and took Amphion with me in the quick rattling waggon of one of the wine-carriers who was going to the city without his wine, and with only a load of flowers for the gardeners.

Amphion scarcely spoke as we flew over the

Campagna. Only once he looked at me with pleasure in his eyes.

“ It is like the sea ! ” he said ; he had arrived by night and had seen nothing of it before this.

It was noon when I got to my fountain on the wall ; and I had to be busy the rest of the day, and the lad would go back with the wine-cart at sunset. I took him up to Giojà’s room ; she was sometimes at home at noon, and was so now.

“ Here is a Greek boy for you,” I said to her, and put Amphion into the chamber with his sad, lovely face, that would have done for Italus, and his pretty dress all loose and white, and shining with gold thread.

“ Here is a little Greek for you,” I said. “ He is all alone and very unhappy, you know his tongue a little ; will you try and make him a little happier ? ”

“ Are you a Greek, really ? ” said my Ariadnê, coming to him with her grave courtesy, which never was familiarity, but always a little distant like some girl-queen’s.

“ Yes, I am a Greek,” said Amphion, who stood looking at her in a kind of awe.

Giojà's face lighted and grew eager.

“ Then you have heard Homer sung ? Tell me—do they recite it all at night as they used to do round the watch-fires when there is danger, and in the summer in time of peace, under the olive trees—tell me ? ”

“ What is Homer ? ” said poor Amphion.

Giojà glanced at him with contempt.

“ You are no Greek,” she said, and turned away.

“ Why did you bring him here ? ” she said to me. “ He asks what Homer is ! ”

“ My dear,” I said to her, “ he was a little peasant, on a little isle in the sea ; I have been to those islands ; the people only think of their flocks and their hay and their harvest. They tell tales indeed at night, as of old, but it is not of Achilles and Ithakus now ; it is of the hill thieves on the main shore, or of the soldiers billeted on themselves, or of the next love that the priest is to bless, or of whatever else may be happening. Be kind to him. You can make him understand, though you only know the Greek of the poets. And he will play to you.”

Amphion, who could not understand what I said, understood the contempt of those lustrous eyes resting on him, and felt that it was something shameful not to know what Homer was.

He came with shy and timid grace, and knelt to her, and touched the hem of her skirt with his lips.

“ I cannot read, and Homer—is it a singer you mean?—but if you will let me play I will tell you so what I feel ; you are like the sunrise on our sea ; our girls there are fair, but not like you.”

Giojà laughed, a thing she seldom did.

“ You come from the country of Helen, and call *me* good to look upon?—and what music can there ever be like the march of the hexameters telling of your heroes ? But if you are not happy—then I am sorry. I suppose I speak ill ; I know enough Greek to read it, but that is not your Greek. You can play to me while I finish my work if you like, and afterwards I will tell you about Homer.”

He had his flute in pieces in his vest, where he

always carried it, a silver flute that Hilarion had bought for him.

He sat down on the floor, as he was used to sit on his bit of carpet under the great plane-tree at home in the starry evenings; and, with his eyes still fastened on her as on some creature of another world, he began to make his tender melodies, there at the foot of my Hermes.

I left them so, and went my way down to the stall and Palès, who was grumbling sore at being left alone so long.

They were a boy and girl, it was a fresher and more healthful interest for her than the poems of Hilarion.

When I went up the stairs an hour afterwards to see if they were friends, I opened the heavy door so that I did not disturb them. Amphion was sitting on the floor, his flute lying across his knees, and Giojà, seated high above on the old oak-seat under the Hermes, was telling him the story of Patrocles' burial, and of how the absent Winds were feasting in the house of Zephyrus till the swift-footed Iris fetched them, and how they rose and scourged the clouds before them,

across the Thracian sea, until the flames leaped up, and making night terrible, devoured the body of his hero and the golden curls of his friend, and the honey and the horses, and the rich wood steeped with the wine that all night long Achilles poured from the golden bowl till daylight broke.

Amphion's pale face was glowing, and his eyes were full of wonder: nothing so wearies as a twice told tale, says Homer; but yet he told tales that echoing through thousands of years are ever fresh and ever welcome.

Giojà, to whom every word that she recited was true as that the sun hung high in heaven, saw nothing of him, but only saw the Thracian shore, the blowing flames, the surging sea, the peace that came with morn.

I closed the door unheard, unwilling to disturb them or break in on those old sweet Greek cadences that her voice tinged with a Latin accent, not ungracious; and I was sorry when still another hour later I had to fetch the lad away to go back, as he was ordered to Daïla.

“I was going now to tell him of Ulysses,”

said Giojà, reluctantly. "Only think! He has a brother called Ulysses, and yet does not know——"

"It will be for another day," I said. Amphion's face had a warm colour in it, and looked happy.

"I may come again?"

"Yes. Do you still wish to go back to the goats?"

"No," he said, and smiled.

"I do not care for the heroes," he whispered to me as we went down the stairs. "And why did he burn his friend? I do not understand. But do not tell her;—the sound of her voice is so lovely;—that is enough."

I began to doubt whether I should not have done better for him to have left him in his solitude and sorrowfulness, eating his peaches underneath the wall with the sunflowers. But I had been thinking more of her than of him. To interest her in something living and natural, instead of always old stories and old marble, seemed to me desirable. The boy was better than Apollo Soranus.

Maryx passed me that evening on the stairs.

“Is Giojà there?” he asked. “I have a pleasure for her, at least if it be one to her; she is so unlike to others that one cannot tell. They want her at the Caprarola palace to-night.”

“In that great world?” I stammered; for they were amongst the haughtiest of our princes.

“Is she not worthy it?” said Maryx, with some impatience of me and contempt. “Nay—is that worthy her? They have seen her clay figures and her drawings; they would see her; it would be best; she lives too much alone. Can we persuade her?”

“But in her clothes—she has none fit.”

“I thought of that. I got Ersilia to steal me one of her old woollen dresses when there was first talk of it a week ago; I have clothes fit for her below. But will she go? That is what I doubt;——”

“Will Hilarion be there?”

“No doubt. Why?”

“Tell her so. She will go then.”

Maryx changed countenance a little, and his broad brows knit together.

“ Has he so much influence—already ? ”

“ No influence that I know of; but attraction.”

“ Do you want me ? ” asked Giojà at that moment, her slender body hanging over the rail in the gloom ; the lamp that always burned there under a Madonna shone on the soft colours of her face, and gave it a Titian look. He told her why he came. She did not answer anything.

“ Are you glad or sorry, willing or unwilling ? Say ! ” he said a little quickly, and with some disappointment.

“ How can I be either ? It does not matter.”

“ You are right. It does not matter. Only so many are so pleased at such things—will you come ? ”

“ If you wish me.”

“ Oh, child ! It is the greatest house in Rome, and what an honour ! ” cried Ersilia, who was washing at a tub in a niche in the staircase wall.

“ In a great house or a small, I suppose one is always oneself,” said Giojà, to whose mind no

ideas of social difference could present themselves; she had only lived on the wild sea coast and in the old chamber with Hermes, on the bridge; and in the house of Maryx all greatness was fused into that of art, and no other recognised.

Maryx himself stood thoughtful and a little troubled.

“ I think that it is best,” he said, half to me, half to himself. “ It is unjust to her, it is selfish, to shut her up like a dove in a tower. What do you say?——”

“ I suppose it is. And to the tower the hawks can come.”

“ St. Barbara’s father built a tower to keep her in and shut out the blessed news of Christ,” said Ersilia from her washtub. “ But it was of no use, you know. The great news found her there. No tower is too high for the angels to soar to,—”

“ And so you mean——?”

“ That, whether hawk or angel is to be her fate, either will come to her, whether she be here or there,” said Ersilia, wringing her linen.

“You are a fatalist,” said Maryx, with a smile. “It is a curious creed; it nerves whilst it emasculates.”

“Nay, I am a good Christian,” said Ersilia, who did not understand a word he said, but felt that he impugned her faith; “and I will get my hands dry in a minute, and go fetch that box of clothes. Why dilly-dally about it? Let her have honour and pleasure while she can. There is not much to be had anywhere.”

That was a joyous and grand night to Ersilia; but it was doomed to be a hapless one. We did our best in honesty of intent. The gods made sport of us; and I think there are few things sadder than the way in which honest intents and candid and innocent efforts to do right are, so often as we see them in this world, twisted and turned by obstinate and unkind influences to the hurt of those that feel them. It is as cruel as though one were to take a child's long curls to strangle him with, when he was coming up for kisses.

It was a joyous night to Ersilia, who, in truth,

had been sometimes picked to pieces by the neighbours for harbouring a strange girl.

“She goes amongst the princes,” she said proudly to all her gossips. And she attired her with a tenderness one never would have believed could have been in her, looking at her fierce and broad black eyes that lit so quickly into rage.

But an hour later Ersilia called to me shrilly, coming to the end of the bridge and screaming in a way that would have almost frightened back Porsenna, had he been, as of yore, on the other side.

I hurried to her call.

“Only think,” shouted Ersilia, her face all in a dark flame of wrath. “Only think—she will not wear them! No, not for anything will she wear them! Was there ever such perversity? Come you and speak to her. Lovely stuffs fit for an empress! I always said she was not natural. The marble has got into her herself. Who ever heard of any girl that did not care for clothes?”

“What is it, Giojà?” I asked her when I had mounted.

“I will not wear them,” she said simply. “I did not understand. If I cannot go as I am, then not at all. These clothes must have cost much money, and I have none.”

“Money!” screamed Ersilia. “Of course! Money! Enough for an honest girl’s dower, that I know, for he grudged nothing! How can you look at them and say you will not put them on? *Jesù Maria!* It is impious.”

“Why will you not wear them?” I asked *Giojà* quietly.

The tears came in her eyes.

“I shall be sorry if I pain him. He is good and generous. But I cannot pay for them. I will not take them. No, I will not.”

“But, my dear, it is impossible for you to go to a great house unless you go suitably——”

“Then I will not go; I do not care to go. What is it to me?—except that I am sorry if I pain him.”

“May one enter?” said *Hilarion*, standing at the door, and not perceiving me. It had grown dusk, and the lights were beginning to burn on the winding bank of the river.

When he did see me he smiled—that tantalising smile of his which might mean anything or nothing, and must have hurt many a woman worse than a blow or an oath.

Giojà coloured as she saw him—a warm, wavering blush that went to the very waves of the hair hanging over her brows. She was silent.

The white robes of Maryx’s choosing were lying there with some jewellery of Etruscan gold found by himself years before in old tombs opened at his cost under the thick brushwood about Veii.

“What is the question at issue? May I hear?”

He spoke as if he had already known her for years.

Giojà looked at him with the flush fading.

“It is that I will not wear—all that. He has sent it: he is always so good. But why should I go thither even? I do not want the great people, if they be great; nor am I great myself, that they should seek me. If I could go as I am it would be very well; but if I cannot I will stay

away. The things are beautiful, no doubt ; but the very last words nearly that my father spoke were, ‘Keep free—have your hands empty, but clean—take nothing.’ So I cannot take anything, even though he gives it.”

Hilarion looked at her intently. He did not ask any more. He had the poet’s quickness of compassion, and could gather whole facts from fragmentary words.

“No doubt you are right,” he said, as though he had heard it all from the beginning. “And why should you go into that vapid and turbulent world that calls itself great? You could only lose. The artist always loses. Society is a crucible in which all gold melts. Out of it are drawn only one of two prizes—vanity or disgust; the perfectly successful in it, are like the children that the Chinese imprison in jars from their birth—dwarfs that believe their compressed distortion to be beautiful. Hermes here is a better companion than the world. What do you say, Crispin?”

“I say, let her do as she likes,” I answered roughly ; for I was angry with his presence there.

“I cannot say that she is wrong—no one could say so ; but such a trifle I think she might have taken without harm to her pride ; and it is hard on Maryx, thinking only to give pleasure, and believing it bad, as it is bad, for her to live alone here, dreaming of broken marbles and dead gods—not that I would speak lightly of either the gods or arts—but such a life is too mournful, and in a little while it will become morbid.”

“Better that than the foul gases of crowded rooms and empty compliments. Maryx and you are both at fault, my sensible Lupercus !” said Hilarion, with that smile which so provoked me, his eyes resting on the girl, who herself stood abstracted and sorrowful, the tears still not dry upon her lashes.

“Take them away,” she said to Ersilia, with a gesture towards the pretty rejected things. Then she lifted her arms with a little sigh of relief, like one decided to put down a burden. “I do not want to see these people. I see them pass. They look foolish ; they are just the same as when Juvenal wrote about them, I suppose. And what do they want with me ?”

“I will tell you what they want,” said Hilarion. “Genius scares the world. It is like the silver goblet to Œdipus, telling of vanished greatness and the power of the gods; the world that is like Œdipus, blind and old and heavy with many nameless sins, cannot bear the reproach of it; it wants to stamp it into dust. Never being quite able to do that, it fondles it, fills it with sugared drinks, nails it with golden nails to the board where fools feast. Often the world succeeds, and the goblet falls to baser uses and loses the power to remind the blind sinner any more of the ancient glories and of the dishonoured children of Zeus. Can you understand?—only my allegory halts, as most allegories do. Œdipus was repentant: the world never repents. So I think you are right not to go to it. Keep the silver goblet for yourself, and only touch it with your own lips, since from the gods it came to you.”

There was a sort of emotion in his voice as he said the last words. Nor was it affected. In his impulses he was always sincere, and his impulse then was earnest, was tender, and was sorrowful.

He himself had let his silver goblet often fall, and be often choked up with the lees of spilled wines and the dust of dead passions.

Her face lightened with a happy smile. It was like remembered music to her to hear this kind of speech. She did not answer in words. She seemed to me to be timid with Hilarion, and to lose that calm, indifferent composure which characterised all her intercourse with other people.

“We are so serious, and you are so young!” said he, shaking off the momentary depression that had fallen on him. “You have lost a night’s pleasure, too. We are bound to make you amends. Crispin, you look as dull as Pasquino without a pasted epigram. Wake up! Hermes wonders at you; he thinks that when men’s lives are so short as they are, it is astonishing they should spend any of their little measure of time in mere moodiness; and you—you used never to know the meaning of such a word. Now let us see what we can give to Giojà in compensation. I may call you Giojà?”

“Oh, yes; it is my name,” she answered him;

for the only ways that she had known were the simple ways and habits of the people, and of the ceremonies of polished life she knew nothing, though Nature had taught her grace and that serenity which is the highest form of grace.

“It is a lovely name, and has a lovely meaning,” said Hilarion. “Now I have thought—you care for music. Of course you care; music has all the other arts in it, and something that none of them have as well. Will you come and hear some with me? There is my own box always ready, and you can go in your own manner, with your veil if you like, and enjoy it unseen if you please; and Crispino, too, can come. There is the *Zauberflöte* to-night, and there is no magician like Mozart, though at the best he is poorly rendered here. Come, it will be better for you than the crowds that stare.”

“Mozart!”

She had heard some of his music in requiems and masses in the churches; but she had no idea what he spoke of, for she had never been inside a theatre.

“Yes, the *Zauberflöte*—on the whole, the

most perfect music in the world. Of old, the gods came down and whispered their secrets to the poets. You remember Dionysos waking Æschylus amongst the vines, and bidding him go write the *Oresteia*. Nowadays the gods only whisper to the musicians; the poets are left to grope their way amongst the cancer hospitals and the charnel-houses. No doubt it is the poets' fault. What we wish to see I suppose we do see—see most of, at all events, after all. Goethe was the last to listen to the god under the vines. 'What beautiful things the vines have said to me!' he wrote from Italy. And yet, let them pretend what they will, Goethe was not a poet; he was too cold and too clear; and, besides, he could live at Weimar! Well, will you come? Trust me; you will be very happy and very unhappy both at once, and is not that the very essence and epitome of life? Not to have heard great music is like having lived without seeing Rome."

"I will come," said Giojà, and looked at me, "if Maryx will not be vexed. Will he be vexed?"

"My dear," I said to her, "he meant to have

given you pleasure, and he will find that he has failed, and that another has given it instead. That is all. A very common lot—so common that it needs no pity.”

For I was irritated and impatient, and hated Hilarion, though he was doing no harm, but only looking pale and handsome, like any one of the statues that she loved, leaning there underneath Hermes, with the shadows of the coming night about him and his sweet voice coming through the stillness in the fantastic and devious talk which of all other was most certain to enchain her attention by its likeness to her own dreams.

He had his way in the end; he was one of those men who always have their way. She hesitated, and was afraid to pain her absent master, but in the end yielded and went out with him into the night air, which had grown colder and starry, so that already Rome was beginning to look paved with silver and carved with alabaster, as it looks always when the moon shines there.

I followed them as a dog would have done. The horses were there; but the night was beau-

tiful, and they went on, on foot, lingering here and there as the moonlight grew clearer and the shades more black.

Giojâ was well used to Rome at night. After sunset when my labours were done, I often had gone with her through the avenues about the Flavian amphitheatre and the twisting streets whose centre is the mighty dome of Agrippa, or any other of the many quarters familiar to me from my babyhood, and now in my old age eloquent of a million histories. Maryx had gone often with us too. After a long day spent in the studio, it had always been his habit to go about Rome, which he knew by heart, as Ampère knew it, and some of the finest conceptions of his works had come to him sitting in the stillness of the great Thermæ, with only the bats and owls moving between the dull red walls where your northern singer composed his great Prometheus.

I was used to seeing Maryx by her side. It incensed me to watch the graceful head of Hilarion bending to her in his stead; it seemed a wrong to the one who was absent.

It was an ordinary night at the Opera, and the

Apollo Theatre was almost empty, and the little light there was burned very low, as it is our economical habit to have it in our playhouses. And, indeed, what music is not sweetest in the softness of the dusk?

To hear music well, sit in twilight and in stillness, only meeting eyes you love. Your new school, which thinks that music needs the assistance of glitter and glare and pictorial effect, sadly insults the divinest of the arts.

The large box close to the stage belonging to Hilarion was all in gloom; I stayed at the back of it, for I would not leave them; and Giojà in her dark clothing no one saw.

She thought it very strange, the large, shadowy, almost empty space in which the first notes of the orchestra only were dully humming; but when the full glory of the music burst over her, she held her breath, entranced, and one could see her great eyes wide opened and lustrous as the stars.

He did not speak to her, but only watched her. The rendering was in no way fine; but it is impossible for even poor singers utterly to mar the

sway of the Zauberflöte ; and when the music ceased at the first act, the girl was pale as her own marbles, and the tears were coursing down her cheeks in silence.

“ Did I not tell you rightly ? ” said Hilarion, in his soft, caressing voice. “ Are you not most happy and most unhappy ? ”

She smiled on him a little through her tears.

“ It is all the past—it is all the future ! I did not know. Oh, why did they never bring me here ? ”

“ I am glad that it was left for me to do,” he answered her. “ I think Maryx does not care for music. Why do you turn away ? ”

“ I do not want to see the people ; they jar on it,” said Giojà, meaning the actors on the stage. “ Why can they not sing without being seen ? ”

“ I, too, should prefer that,” said Hilarion. “ But then it would no longer be an opera.”

“ Would that matter ? ” said Giojà, who was always indifferent to the great reasoning that because a thing has been so thus it must ever be.

Then she was quiet again and breathless. As

for me, she had forgotten that I lived. She had almost forgotten Hilarion, only that now and again her eyes, brilliant through moisture of unshed tears, like any passion-flowers through dew, turned on him as on the giver of her deep delight. He was her Apollo Soranus.

“You are contented?” he murmured softly once.

She answered him as from a dream:—

“It is like Homer!”

She knew no greater comparison; and perhaps there is none greater.

At the close, the passionate music troubled her, and made her colour rise and her breath come and go. Those lovers in the flames, happy merely because together, she did not understand; yet the tumult of emotions disturbed that classic calm in her which made her always so grave, yet so serene.

She did not speak at all when it was over and she had left the dusky, desolate opera-house; nor did Hilarion speak to her. He understood that the melodies were all about her—in the air,

in the stars, in the very voices of the streets ; and he let the strange passion of which she had heard the first notes steal on her unawares. He was a master in these things.

We went silently through the Tordinona street, and past the house of Raffaele, and homeward. Rome was quiet, and all white with the light of a full moon. Now and then a shadowy form went by, touching a guitar ; now and then an orange-bough heavy with blossom and fruit swung over a wall in our faces ; at one corner there stood a bier, with torches flaring and men praying ; someone was dead—someone dies with every moment, they say ;—the great melodious fountains sounded everywhere through the night, as though the waters were always striving, striving, striving in vain to wash the crimes of the city away—the endless centuries of crime whose beginning is lost in the dull roll of Tullia's chariot-wheels. Tullia ! the vile name !—there is only Tarquinia perhaps viler still. How right the Sabines were when they sent the bronze weight of their shields down on the base

beauty of Tarquinia, the creature that first sold Rome !

All these odd, disjointed thoughts went stumbling through my brain as my feet went stumbling home.

It was late.

At the door I would have sent her upstairs alone and sent Hilarion away ; but he would not have it so, and he was a man that always had his way.

“ Let us see her safe back to Hermes,” he said.

And when we reached Hermes I saw why he had chosen to do that. In our absence his orders had arranged a surprise for her. A fire burnt on the hearth ; there was a little supper spread ; there were many flowers ; there was only the old bronze lamp set burning ; through the unshuttered and grated casement all the moonlit brilliancy of the river was visible.

Giojà gave a little cry of pleasure and of wonder. Maryx had encompassed her with every solid care that strength and nobleness could give ; but he did not think of such little things

as this. Scenic display was not in his temperament.

"This is folly. It is midnight. She eats nothing at this hour. She has to be up at dawn," I grumbled, feeling stupid and ill at ease and angry.

Hilarion laughed at me.

His own way he would have. He was so gay, so gracious, so charming, so kindly, it was impossible to altogether withstand him; and, after all, what harm had he done?

Yet eat I could not, and drink I would not. But if I would be a killjoy, it made no difference to him; it was not for me that his peaches showed their bloom like infants' cheeks, nor for me that his tea-roses clustered round his starry asters.

He had his way, sitting within the broad mellow glow from the hearth-fire, with the great moon looking in through the iron bars, sailing in a silvery radiance of snowy cloud.

She said but little—very little; but I felt that if I had asked her now if she were only content, she would have answered, "I am happy."

Once she got up, and took a little book and gave it to him.

“Read me something—once.”

It was my odd volume of his translated sonnets.

He smiled, and was silent, looking on her face with a dreamy pleasure of contemplation. Then he did read, his memory awakening and the volume closing in his hand, as he read.

What he chose was a fragment of a poem on Sospitra, the woman who, being visited by spirits in the guise of two Chaldeans, was dowered by them with transcendant powers and superhuman knowledge, and was enabled to behold at once all the deeds that were done in all lands beneath the sun, and was raised high above all human woes and human frailties;—save only Love and Death.

Save only Love and Death.

It was a great poem, the greatest that he had ever given to the world, and perhaps the most terrible.

For in it was all the despair of genius, and all the derision of hell.

The woman dwelt alone with the stars and the palms and the falling waters, and was tranquil and proud and at peace; and when night fell, saw all the darkened earth outspread before her as a scroll, and read the hidden souls of millions, and knew all that the day had seen done; and the lion lay at her feet, and the wild antelope came to her will, and the eagle told her the secret ways of the planets, and the nightingale sang to her of lovers smiling in their sleep, and she was equal to the gods in knowledge and in vision, and was content.

Then one day a tired wanderer came and asked her for a draught of water to slake his thirst and lave his wounds. And she gave it, and giving it, touched his hand; and one by one the magic gifts fell from her, and the Chaldeans came no more.

In all the vastness of the universe she only harkened for one voice; and her eyes were blind to earth and heaven, for they only sought one face; and she had power no more over the minds of men, or the creatures of land and air, for she had cast her crown down in the dust,

and had become a slave ; and her slavery was sweeter than had ever been her strength.

Sweeter far—for a space.

Then the wanderer, his wounds being healed and his thirst slaked, wearied, and arose and passed away ; and she was left alone in the silence of the desert. But never more came the Chaldeans.

When the last words died on the silence, the silence remained unbroken. One could hear the lapping of the river against the piles of the bridge, and the sound of the little flames eating the wood away upon the hearth.

Hilarion at length rose abruptly.

“ Good-night, and the Chaldeans be with you ! ” he said ; and touched the soft loose locks on her forehead with a familiarity of gesture that not I or Maryx had ever offered to her.

Giojà did not move ; her face was rapt, pale, troubled, infinitely tender ; she looked up at him and said nothing.

“This is how you keep your promise!” I said faintly, on the stairs; and then paused—for he had made no promise.

Hilarion smiled.

“I would not make any. I never make any. We are all too much the playthings of accident to be able to say ‘I will,’ or ‘I will not.’ And what have I done? Is there harm in the *Zauberflöte*?”

“You are more cruel than the Chaldeans,” I said. “They at least did not call the destroyers.”

Hilarion went out into the night air.

“I hardly know why I read her the poem,” he said, almost regretfully; “it was a pity, perhaps; of love, believe me, I have had more than enough; and besides,” he added, with a laugh that I did not like, “besides, there is *Maryx*!”

Then he went away down the darkness of the *Via Pettinari*, the feet of his horses, wearied with waiting, ringing sharply on the stones.

He went to his duchess, whom he more than half hated; yet with whom he would not break

his unholy relation, because she had that flame in her eyes, and that flint in her heart, at which men whose passions are worn out are glad to strive to rekindle them.





CHAPTER IV.



WITH the morning, Giojà went up as usual to the studio. Maryx was leaning over the balustrade of his terrace, as his habit often was in that lovely time of the clear early morning, when there are still mists hovering about the curving ways of Tiber; yet every spire, and tower, and ruined glory stands out distinct in all their varied architecture against the radiant sky.

Maryx advanced to her, and met her.

“My dear, why did you change your mind last night? Was it not sudden?”

“Yes, it was sudden,” she answered him. “When I saw the things, then I remembered I could not buy them; I would not wear them.

It was good of you; so good; were you vexed?"

Maryx's changeful eyes darkened, and grew dimmer. He gave an angry gesture.

"Such a little thing! Had you not faith enough in me for that? Am I so little your friend after all this time? I, who am your master?"

Giojà was silent. Then she took his hand and touched it with her lips.

"You are more than my friend, and if to serve you I had to hurt myself—that I would do. But this was different; it would have done you no good, and it would have made me ashamed."

He coloured slightly, and his eyes grew soft; he drew away his hand with a sort of impatient confusion.

"God forbid that you should be ashamed—for me! But to refuse such a mere trifle; it looks like distrust of me."

"How could I distrust you?"

She looked in his face whilst she spoke, with the sweet, open seriousness of a young child.

“How could I distrust you—distrust *you* !” she repeated, as he remained silent. “I do not know what you can mean. But I did not wish for those rich things, and I did not wish to go at all.”

Maryx smiled, re-assured.

“If you did not wish to go, my dear, that is another matter. I think you are very wise. The artist loses more by the world than ever he gains from it. It was only that since it opened to you, I thought it right you should have the choice. But I was disappointed a little, I admit; I had looked forward to seeing you move in those great rooms as no girl can move except one like you, whom the sea has made strong, and the trammels of fashion never have fettered; only to see you walk would be despair to them!—but I am content now that you chose as you did; quite content; only you must promise me to keep my poor Etruscan gold. I should have told you so last night, but when I called for you, thinking to find you ready, you were in bed, your window was all dark.”

“But did not Ersilia tell you?”

“Tell me what? Yes. She put her head out of her own casement, and called that you would not touch the clothes nor go; and then she slammed the window to again, and I got no more from her. What did you bid her say?”

“Nothing—I forgot.”

“Forgot to leave a pretty message for me to soften the rejection?” said Maryx, with a smile. “Well, never mind, my dear. Soft words passing by that good soul’s mouth would harden in the passage. Did you sleep well, young philosopher?—pagan though you are, I begin to think you have something of the early Christians in you after all; of S. Ursula, or S. Dorothea.”

Giojà flushed scarlet; then grew pale.

“I did not sleep; I was not at home; I went with him, and he came back with me.”

Maryx, leaning carelessly over the terrace parapet, casting the fallen flowers of the jessamines into the gulf of cactus and aloes below, raised himself erect with sudden quickness, and gazed at her.

“With whom? with what? Went where?—of what are you talking?”

“Him!”

“Who?”

“I went with him,” she answered, very low, vaguely conscious that he grew angered, and that she had done ill. “It was to the music of Mozart. Why did you never take me? I seemed to understand everything in all the world; all that was dark grew clear; I understood why the woman did not feel the flames, nor have any fear of death; then he came back with me, and he had made the room like a garden, and Hermes was covered with roses, and it was very late, and he read to me his own poems, and the one on Sospitra, whom the Chaldean seers raised above every sorrow except death and love:—”

She stopped abruptly at that word; no doubt she could not have told why.

Maryx was silent. He looked like a man who had received a blow, and a blow that his manliness forbade him to return.

His lips parted to speak, but whatever he was about to say, he controlled its utterance.

“Go in to your work, my dear,” he said, after a pause. “It grows late.”

That was all. Giojà looked at him with a hesitating regret.

“Are you displeased?” she asked him, as she lingered. But he had left her, and had come down amongst the aloes, and thus met me, as I ascended the steep slopes of his gardens.

“She was with Hilarion?” he said, abruptly.

“Yes, but there was no harm in that,” I answered him, and told him how the night had been spent.

He heard, looking far away from me towards the great pile of the Farnese glowing like bronze and gold in the morning light.

There was a great pain upon his face, but he said nothing; he was too generous to blame a creature owing so much to him as she did; and Maryx, so eloquent on matters of his art, and so felicitous in discussion and disquisition, was of few words when he felt deeply.

“So long as she had some change and pleasantness, it is not much matter who gave it,” he said, at length, when I had ended. “No doubt he knows how to amuse women better than I do. For the rest we are not her keepers—you and I.”

Then he moved to go on away down his gardens, towards Rome.

“You are not going back to the studio?” I ventured to say, for it was his practice always to spend there the hours of the forenoon, at the least.

“No; I have business yonder,” he made answer; and I lost him to sight in the windings of the cypress alley that shelved sharply downward.

I understood that he did not wish me to go with him then; he had been wounded, and like all other noble animals, sought to be alone.

I went up into his house, where I was always free to wander as I liked; it was beautifully still; the warm sun shone into the open courts; on the marble floors his great hounds lay at rest; the creepers were red with the touch of winter; through the white columns and porphyry arches there was a golden glory of chrysanthemums; it seemed the abode of perfect peace.

I went into the workrooms where the blocks of marble were standing, and the scale stones, and

the iron skeletons to hold the clay; and the workers were labouring under the guidance of the old foreman, Giulio.

Giojà was already at her own work before the plane on which she of late had been modelling in alto relievo.

He had let her choose her own subject, and she had chosen the death of Penthesileia: the fair daughter of Arês lay at the feet of Achilles, her helmet off, her long tresses sweeping this cruel earth that drank her blood; Thersites stood by, on his face the laughter that would cost him life; the Hero bent above her; in the rear were the press and tumult of armed men, the shock of shivered spears, the disarray of startled horses; and farther yet, the distant walls of Troy.

The clay seemed sentient and alive; the whole composition was full of invention and of beauty; and the prominent recumbent figure of Penthesileia, in the drooping flexible abandonment of death, would scarcely have been unworthy of that Greek of the North, your Flaxman.

How great is the sorcery of Art; how mean and how feeble beside it are the astrologers and magicians of mere necromancy!

A little washed earth spread out upon a board and touched by the hand of genius; and lo! the wars of Homer are fought before your eyes, and life and death, and woman's loveliness, and the valour of man, and the very sound of battle, and the very sight of tears, are all in that grey clay!

I looked over her shoulder at her work. I had seen it in its various stages many times; it was now almost complete.

"My dear," I said to her, saying what I thought, "you have that Aaron's wand, which from the bare rods can call forth almond flowers. Be content. Whoever has that, has so much, that if life treat him unkindly in other ways, he can well afford to bear it."

Giojà sighed a little restlessly; leaning her face upon her hands, and looking down upon the plane on which her Penthesileia lay.

"Is it good?" she said, doubtfully. "Yesterday I thought so; I was so glad in it; but now——"

“ Well ?—now ? ”

“ I do not care for it. Who can say in a world of marble what he can say in two lines of his Sospitra ? ”

Her eyes were full of tears ; she had no pleasure in her noble Homeric labour ; she could not have told why.

“ Sospitra be accursed, and he who wrote it ! ”
I muttered in my throat.

“ You place the poet highest of all artists,” I said aloud, with such patience as I could assume. “ Well, very likely you are right. He interprets the passions, the aspirations, the pains, and the gladness of living—what we call the soul—more directly, and of course with much more research and intimacy, than any other artist can do. The sculptor and the painter can but deal with the outward expression of emotion, and with Nature in her visible and tangible forms. The singer, the reciter, in every nation, from Hellas to Scandinavia, was the earliest inspired ; his were the first notes heard in the dusk of the world’s slow dawn. It is natural that supremacy remains

with him. But this is finished. What do you do to-day ? ”

She lifted her hair off her forehead—thick, clustering soft hair, that was a weight to her small head.

“ I do not know ; I am tired ; is Maryx angry with me, that he does not come ? ”

“ He is gone into Rome. No. He is not angry ; perhaps he is pained.”

“ I am sorry.”

“ You see he meant to give you pleasure, and he failed, and another succeeded. A small thing perhaps ; still a man may be wounded.”

“ I wonder if he would think this good,” she murmured, her eyes still on her Penthesileia. “ Do you think he would see any strength or beauty in it at all ? ”

“ Maryx ! But surely you must know ! He never says what he does not think, nor ever stoops to give you mere flattery.”

“ I did not mean Maryx,” she said, and then she turned away, and went to a desk in an inner room, and began to translate the legendary portions of Pausanias relating to Endœus ; a kind

of employment which her master had given her to change at intervals the posture and the position of work at the clay, which he thought were not good too long together, for one of her sex, and one so young.

I let her alone ; it was of no use to speak ; I went and talked a little to the old woman who sat in her wooden shoes in the beautiful chambers, and who looked out over Rome, and wished she were hoeing in a cabbage plot.

“ Is the girl here to-day ? ” asked the mother of Maryx. “ Ah ! She has not been to see me this morning.”

“ Does she always come ? ”

“ Always. We manage to understand each other. Not very much ; but enough. It is good to look at her ; it is like seeing the vines in flower.”

“ Shall I call her here ? ”

“ No. Let her be. Perhaps Germain wants her.”

“ You have grown to like her ? ”

“ Yes ; one likes what is young. And then she is very fair to look at ; a fair face is so

much ; it was hard in the good God to make so many faces ugly ; to be born ugly—that is, to enter the world with a hobble at your foot—at least, when you are a woman. Will my son marry her, think you ? ”

“ I cannot tell. Who has thought of it ? ”

“ No one. Only myself. But a man and a girl—that is how it always ends ; and he is not quite young, but he is so noble to look at, and so good and so great. I think that is how it will end. And why not ? It would be better for him—something living—than those marble women that he worships. You see he is very great and famous, and all that, but there is no one to watch for his coming and look the brighter because he comes. And a man wants that. I am his mother indeed. But that is not much, because I am very stupid, and cannot understand what he talks of, nor the things he does, and all the use that I could be—to sew, to darn, to sweep, to make the soup—that he does not want, because he is so great, and can live as the princes do. All the world admires him and honours him—oh yes—but then, at home, he is

all alone. But do not say a word—not a word. Love is not like a bean plant ; you cannot put it in where you wish and train it where you like. If it grow, it grows, and it is God or the devil who sets it there : may the saints forgive me ! ”

Then she folded her hands, and began telling her beads, a little, quiet, brown figure, like a winter leaf, amidst the splendours of the room, with her wooden shoes sunk in the thick eastern carpets, and the leaden effigy of the Madonna that she had bought for a copper at a fair in her girlhood, still hung round her throat as more precious than pearls.

She was a good soul ; she would have taken to her heart any creature that her son had loved, or that had loved him ; she was old, and ignorant, and stupid, as she said, but she was upright and just, and what was pure, that she thought worthy. The greatness of her son she could not comprehend, and of his works and of his genius she was afraid—not understanding them ; but she would have understood if she had seen him happy with the simple common joys of innocent affection.

“But I am fearful; yes, I am fearful,” she murmured, with her hands clasped together. “Because, you see, he has been good to her, very good; and my life has been long, and never yet did I see a great benefit done but what, in time, it came back as a curse. The good God has ordered it so that we may not do what is right just for sake of reward.”

Then she told her beads, unwitting of the terrible irony she had uttered.

I left her sorrowfully, and went down the hill past the bright Pauline water, down the old Aurelian way, to my stall by Ponte Sisto for the labours of the day.

A sorrowful constraint fell upon us all after that morning, and marred the happy, unstrained intercourse with which our time had gone by so pleasantly. Maryx said nothing, and nothing was altered in Giojà's mode of life, but still there was a change; there was that “little rift in the wood,” which, with the coming of a storm, strikes down the tree.

For me I sat and stitched in the driving of the winds which began to grow very chill, and

the neighbours round said that I had become churlish.

One is so often thought to be sullen when one is only sad. Anxiety is a sorry bedfellow, and when one rises in the morning he has chilled us for the day.

Palès snapped at her cats, and worried them, and gambolled before her lovers, and growled at them, and said, as plainly as her sharp black nose and fox's eyes could speak to me, "Why not come away to the Falcone and eat a bit of porcupine, and enjoy yourself as you used to do, and never trouble your head?"

But I would not adopt her philosophy, even though Fortune did so favour me at that time, that in a roll of old vellum I bought to cut up for shoe linings, I actually found a fragment of a manuscript of a *Tractatus in Mattheum* of S. Hieronimus, written by an Italian scribe, and with some of the floreated borders still visible.

"Your lot should have been cast in those times, Crispin," said Hilarion, who saw it, and would have given me a roll of bank notes for it if I would have taken them. "What a monk

you would have made! I think I see you—spelling out the Greek manuscripts, collecting miniatures for the library Gospels, keeping an eye on the wines in the buttery, tending the artichoke and the sweet herbs, talking to Erasmus in Latin when he passed your way, and getting all the artists that had work in the chapel to do something or another for your cell, which would have been sure to have had a painted window and a vine climbing about the window. You were meant for a sixteenth-century monk. There is no greater hardship than to be born in an age that is too late for us.”

But I could not jest with him, for he had come down from the house on the bridge in that hour of dusk when Giojà’s studies were over. It was worse than useless to object in any way; he would only have laughed: and after all, as Maryx had said, we were not her keepers, and how could we insult him by saying that he should not approach her?

“Have you seen her Penthesileia?” I asked him?

“At the studio? Yes.”

“And what do you think of it?”

“It is wonderful; like everything that Maryx does; entirely noble, and pure, and classic.”

“Maryx! He had no hand in it; he never touched it! Unaided she composed and executed every line of it! What are you thinking of?”

“My dear Lupercus, that is no woman’s work—and a girl’s too—a mere child’s! How can you believe it?”

“I believe it, as I believe in the sun that hangs in the heavens!” I said savagely, and feeling ready to strike him. “What! a man all truth and candour, and a girl who is truth itself, conspire to thrust a lie upon us like that?—the very idea is an infamy. I tell you it is as utterly her own as the stitches in this shoe that I have stitched are mine!”

“You excite yourself; and I meant no infamy at all. Only, of course, it is Maryx’s brain that has guided her hand everywhere; what shame is there in that? It is an impossible work for a girl of her years to have conceived and executed alone.”

“Have you told her so?”

“Of course not. I never tell truth to any woman, and she has genius of her own, no doubt; more is the pity.”

“The pity? And you are a poet?”

“Am I? The world has said so, but I have been very doubtful all my days.”

And indeed he was so with reason, for though he had a magical power of magnificent versification, and a classical grace of structure that amazed and awed his age, he was in no sense a poet, for he had no faith, and he derided love.

“Tell her what you have told me of the Penthesileia, and she will hate you,” I said to him.

“Will she?” said he, with a little smile. “Tell her then, if you like.”

I went a little later and found her; there were some logs on the hearth, and she sat dreaming before them, drawing lines in the embers with a charred stick. Her face was flushed, her eyes were abstracted and humid.

I had never before found her losing time, doing nothing; she to whom the past was so full of inexhaustible riches, and the future so

open for all accomplishments, that study was to her as their playtime to children, and their love tryst to other maidens.

“He says that you did not do your *Penthesileia*,” I said to her abruptly. “*Hilarion* says so. He is certain that it is the work of *Maryx*.”

She coloured, and shrank a little as if in pain.

“He is wrong,” she said, simply. “But it is natural he should think so, and what merit there is in it must of course be most due to my master—that is quite true.”

I felt my blood boil in my veins, for I knew that she shrouded her own pain in that patience, because she would not acknowledge that this stranger who misjudged her, was cruel.

“I see you will be only a woman, my dear,” I said, bitterly. “I thought you were something above your sex—aloof from it—born for art and nothing else, a very offspring of the gods you love. But I see you will be only a woman after all.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you suffer wrong, misjudgment, and

even insult, in patience, when you like the giver of them."

She looked thoughtfully into the red embers on the hearth; her face was troubled.

"If he knew me better he would not doubt me at all. It is not his fault. I think he has lived with false people. But he ought not to doubt Maryx; he has known him so long, and Maryx could not lie. But I dare say he only says it to try me."

"And you forgive that?"

She was silent a moment.

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, after a little. "It must be such pain to him to doubt so much—if he do really doubt. I suppose that is what you meant by the snakes of Heine."

"You have a noble soul, my dear."

She opened her grave soft eyes on me in surprise. She would have understood praise of her Penthesileia, but she did not understand it of herself.

I left her in the dull glow of the wood ashes, with the tawny-coloured sunset of the

winter's eve shining behind the iron bars of the casement, and tinging the Pentelic marble of the Hermès to pale gold. When I had got half-way down the stairs, she came after me.

“Do you think he does really disbelieve?”

“He disbelieves everything; it is a habit; many men are like that who have been spoiled by Fortune. What does it matter?”

“But if I did some greater thing? Something the world called great; he would believe then?”

“My child, go on with your noble fancies without caring whether he have faith or good faith, or neither; Hilarion will always say some gracious thing to you; some captious thing of you to another; in his world, sincerity is rusticity; what does it matter? The artist should never heed any one individual opinion; to do so is to be narrowed at once; if you must have any one in especial, have that of Maryx alone: a great master and a just judge.”

She did not seem to hear, her eyes glistened in the yellow light of the Madonna's lamp.

“I will do something greater, very great; then

he must believe," she said, low to herself; and I could see her heart was heaving fast.

"As great as you like; but for yourself, not for Hilarion, or for any man," I said to her. "If your likeness in Borghese had kept the clue and the sword in her own hands, she never had been stranded on the rocks of Dia. Remember that."

But she did not heed me; her eyes had got in them a far-away gaze, and her young face grew resolute and heroic.

"If I had the clue and the sword," she said softly, "I would guide him through the maze of doubt, and I would kill the snakes about his feet."

I bade her good-night; she had no more than ever any thoughts of human love; he was to her Apollo Soranus; that was all. What else but harm could I have done by shaking her awake, and bidding her beware? This might be only a dream the more—and so fade.

"If only he would go away!" I said to Palès and the faun in the fountain.

But it was the cool crisp beginning of winter,

with all the shades of purple on the hills, where the grasses and flowers had died, and the virgin snow upon Soracte, and the cyclamen in the hollows where the buried cities lay; and in winter and spring Hilarion loved Rome, even if he had ceased to love his duchess, with the broad imperial eyes; ceased such love as alone he knew, worshipping the false gods of Apatê and Philôtes.

“Does she hate me?” said he that day, with a smile in his calm blue eyes; eyes that had so much light in them, and so little warmth.

“No. She is only sorry for you,” I said, bluntly. “Sorry that you have the pain of doubt, and the meanness of it; nay, *she* did not say that last word—that is mine. Do you understand a great soul, great writer that you are, and vivisector of men and of women? There is not very often one in this world, but there is one up yonder where that lamp burns under my Hermes.”

Hilarion was silent.

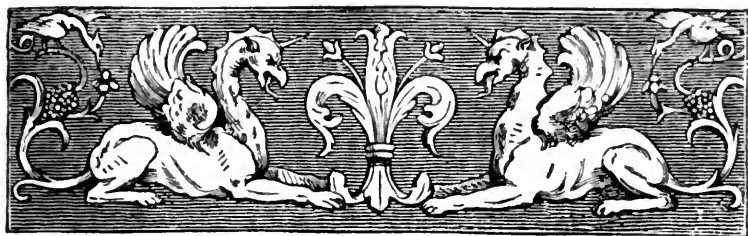
One might almost have said he was ashamed.

He bade me good-night gently, and did not go

up towards the bridge; he would take rough words with sweet temper, and own a truth that went against himself; these were amongst those gracious things with which Nature had made him, and which the world and its adulation, and his own contemptuous temper had not uprooted.

“If only he would but go away!” I said to Palès and the Faun in the fountain.





CHAPTER V.

“My son,” said his mother to Maryx, one day, in the twilight, “is not the girl ‘changed? She comes so little to me; and why do you never read to her in the evening time, as last winter you did? I did not understand the words, but it had a fine sound; I liked to listen to it.”

“She is a year older,” said Maryx, “and do the same things ever please long?”

“Fools—no. But she is not foolish; she cannot be fickle, I think. Do you ask her to come?”

“She does as she likes best. She knows that she is always welcome.”

“And what does she do instead?”

“She sits at home, in her room, and studies.”

The old woman spun on at her wheel ; she was remembering the days of her youth.

“ Is there no one there ? ” she said, sharply. “ Is there a youth—a student ? any one young as she is ? ”

“ Not that I know of :—No.”

“ There must be some one, or else——. Germain, you are a great man, and wise, and go your own ways ; but maybe you turn your back on happiness. I have heard that wise people often do that. They look up so at the sun and the stars, that they set their foot on the lark that would have sung to them, and woke them brightly in the morning—and kill it. Are you like that, my son ? ”

He changed colour.

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I mean this,” said his mother, ceasing to spin, and looking up at him in the firelight. “ Why do you let the girl escape you ? Why do you not marry her ? ”

His proud brows bent together, and grew warm.

“ Why say such things to me ? Do you think——”

“Yes. I think that you have some love for her ; perhaps you do not know it ;—very well.”

Maryx was silent, communing with his own heart.

“If I did,” he said slowly and sadly, at length, neither denying nor affirming, “that would not be enough ; she has no thought of me ; no thought at all, except as her master.”

“That you cannot tell,” said his mother, simply. “The heart of a girl—that is as a rose still shut up—if it be too much frozen it never opens at all. Look you, Germain, you have been so busied with your marble women, and those vile living things that bare themselves before you, that you have not thought perhaps ; but I remember what girls were. I was a girl so long, long ago, down there in the old village, washing my linen in the brook, and seeing your father come through the colza and the rose-fields. Oh, yes ! I can remember, and this I can tell you—women are poor things ; they are like swallows numbed in the winter ; the hand that warms them, and lifts them up, puts them in the breast without trouble. If you would be

loved of a woman, give her the warmth of love ; she will be roused, and tremble a bit, and perhaps try to get away, but she will be like the numbed swallow—if you close your hand fast she is yours. Most women love love, and not the lover. Take my word ! ”

Maryx had grown very pale. He smiled a little.

“For shame, mother ! That is what the wanton Pauline Venus said in Crispin’s dream in Borghese. And if it be not ourselves, but only the passion that is loved, where is the worth of such love ? ”

“Nay, if you begin to question, I get stupid. I keep to the thing I say. I know what I mean. She is asleep. He who wakes her, him will she cling to ; there is an old song that says that in our country. Why not be the one ? She has a great heart, though it is all shut up, and silent.”

Maryx made no answer.

“Why are bad men the men that women love the most ? ” muttered his mother to the distaff, her mind plunging into a depth of recollection,

and stirring it dully. "Only because they are foremost, because they have no modesty, because they burn women up in their fires—as the children burn up the locusts in summer nights. Oh, I have not forgotten what I used to see, and to hear. Why let another come up with the lighted tow, while you stand by, and say nothing?"

"Because it would be base to say anything," he answered her, suddenly, lifting his bent head and with a sternness in his voice that his mother had never heard. "Do you not see? she is friendless, and without money or a home. She has a great talent; nay, a great genius; she depends on me for all the means of making her what she may be, what she will be, as a true artist in the years to come; were she to cease to come to me now, it would be impossible to measure what her loss might not be by broken studies and unaided effort. Do you not see? She can take everything from me now with no thought, and no sort of shame; she can come to me in all her difficulties as a child to a father; she can do here

what it is easy for us to make her believe is student's labour worthy of its wage; it is an innocent deception—she was so proud, one was obliged to lead her thus a little astray. Do you not see?—if I approach her as a lover, all that is over. She does not care for me—not in that way; and how can I seek to know whether she ever would, since if I speak words of love to her, and they revolt her, she is scared away from here, and loses all guidance and all aid. Do you not see? I am not free. Speaking to her as you would have me, I should but seem a creditor demanding payment. I cannot be so mean as that. Granted that she is as the frost-numbed swallow that you think of, it is not for me, since I have sheltered her, to say, ‘be all my own, or else I cast you forth;’ and it would be to say that, since what woman, however young or unsuspecting, could remain under the roof of a lover she repulsed? Love is not born from benefits, and must not be claimed by them.”

His mother looked up at him, as he spoke, impetuously and almost fiercely, in the common tongue of their native province.

“You are a good man, Germain,” she said, humbly, with the tears in her old dim eyes. “A better man than your mother is a woman. For if she be deaf to you, if she be as a stone to your greatness and your generosity, I would say let her be cast forth, and come to misery as she may, for she will merit it. Yes, that is what I would say, and there is no evil that I would not do to her ; the saints above forgive me !”

“Hush !” said Maryx, with a sad smile, that broke through the sternness and pain upon his face. “That is because you think too well of me, and set too great a store on me. It would be very base in us to claim her merely because we befriend her. The very savages leave free their guests, once having sheltered them. Besides, she is not as other maidens are ; she has a great genius in her ; that at least must be sacred, to me above all other men. Could I do wrong to her, I would not do wrong to that. What should I be ? A high priest dishonouring his own altar !”

His mother was silent. Her lower and duller mind could not attain the nobility of his, but she

honoured it, and did not oppose it. Only she muttered rather to herself than him :

“ Your talk of what you call genius, that I do not understand ; and if it bring hardness of heart, then it is an accursed thing and abominable ; and as for making stone images—that is not woman’s work. She is seventeen years old, and fair as a flower ; instead of shaping stone, and hanging over it, and setting all her soul on it, she should be seeing her own eyes in a living child’s face, and feeling its little wet mouth at her breast. What would she care for her marble things then ? ”

Maryx stood by the fire-place ; his face was in shadow ; all that his mother had said to him had stirred his heart painfully, and showed him in naked truth what he had striven to put away from him, and had refused to dwell upon, even in his innermost thoughts.

“ Good-night,” he said at last, arousing from his silence. “ I must go to the Vatican. I have promised Antonelli. Never speak of this any more. It is useless, and it pains me.”

“ But is it impossible—— ? ”

His face changed, and his olive cheek grew paler and then warm again.

“I think so—yes. But who knows? Perhaps some time—but yet,—no gift that was not a free gift to me would I ever take. I could better go unloved all my life than be offered a passionless pale mistress, yielded from gratitude and given up without joy as the payment of debt. *That* were a hell indeed!”

Then he bent his head to her farewell, and went out to go to the great Cardinal. His way lay through the room where Giojà was used to work.

There was a single lamp burning. He paused and looked at the Penthesileia. The tears came into his eyes for the first time since the day that, starving and friendless and wretched, he had won the Prize of Rome in his youth.

The high desk was near, with the Greek and Latin volumes, and the loose sheets of her translations from them, and the goosequills that she had written with, and the glass that she had filled with heliotrope and myrtle to be near her as she wrote.

He touched them all with his hand caressingly.

“Ah, my dear! how safe you would be with me!” he murmured half aloud.

Then he went out; but as he went, the whiteness of a marble figure barred his way.

A sickly sense of impatience passed over him as he turned to avoid it in his passage to the door and glanced upward at the lamp-illuminated face, which was that of the Apollo Citharædus—the face of Hilarion.





CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE almond-eyed Greek Amphion came often, with his flute in the pocket of his vest, to the house upon the bridge ; and he played to her, but she ceased to recite to him.

“ He does not feel it ; what is the use ? ” she said. But of his melodies she was never tired, and he was never tired of playing them.

She would sit by the embers of the hearthfire and listen with half-closed eyes. The boy was no more to her than a chorister or a nightingale ; less, for the nightingale she would have ever imagined to be the sorrowful sister of Itys, and so would have cherished it.

She grew dreamier than of old, she studied less, she passed far fewer hours in the studio.

One day Maryx found her with her head resting

on her arms beside a plane on which the wet clay was spread out, awaiting her compositions. When she lifted her head, her eyes were heavy with tears.

“What use is it to create anything?” she said, before he could speak. “He would always think that I did not do it.”

Maryx turned away from her without a word.

Then a little later she took up work with eager energy and feverish ambition, for she had become changeable and uncertain; she, the equable, meditative, deep-souled young muse who had been so indifferent and so serene, thinking that nothing mattered much, since there were Art and Rome.

As for Hilarion, who had dropped this poison of unrest into her heart, I seldom saw him. I never found him in her room. Ersilia told me that he went sometimes at noonday or at twilight, and no doubt it was so; but for some weeks I never saw him there. I had to be busy in the days; for light was short, and as the last week of the Carnival drew near, all the lads and lasses of my quarter came to me to

be shod afresh for the tarantella and the masque ; and Palès had to eat, and I, and there was no longer that little store of money in the cupboard in the wall ; and when I saw a bit of black-letter manuscript, or a rusty gem, or a fragment of old marble turned up from under the share, I had to look the other way, and could not even think of them.

One day when I was there Maryx found her again sitting beside her untouched works, with one hand buried in the clusters of her hair, and her face hung, in a very ecstasy of adoration, over the open pages of a volume. It was the volume which contained the poem of Sospitra.

Maryx went and looked over her shoulder, and read also, she not hearing or perceiving him. I had come to accompany her homeward over the bridge ; for it was near six of the evening, and the vespers were being said and sung in all the million churches of our Rome.

His face grew dark as he read. He touched her, and she looked up. Her eyes had a soft moisture in them, languid and lovely, and her cheeks were flushed.

“You have forsaken Homer!” he said, abruptly.
“He is the finer teacher. Go back to him.”

She was silent. She seemed still in a dream.

Maryx shut the volume of the *Sospitra* with a gesture as though he had touched some noxious fruit.

“Those verses that you wander in,” he said roughly, “are like our Roman woods in mid-summer—glades of flowering luxuriance whose soil is vile from putrefaction, and whose sunset glories are fever and delirium and death. Come out from them and walk as you used to love to walk in the old Homeric temples, where you learn the excellence of strength and patience and the mysteries of gods. You waste your time and you misuse your gifts, hanging on that persuasive sorcery of words that has no single good or great thing that it can tell you of, but only stories of fever and decay.”

She seemed to awaken from her dream and listen to him with an effort. She took the volume tenderly from where he had pushed it.

“You are unjust,” she said; “and I think you do not understand.”

Then I saw that she flushed hotly again, and I thought to myself that, alas! alas! she had begun to understand only too well the lessons of that fatal book—fatal and fateful as Francesca's.

The face of her master flushed hotly too.

“Perhaps I am unjust,” he said abruptly. “But I think not. I would say to him what I say to you. He is no poet:—Hilarion. He is a singer of songs, and his heart is cold, and his passion is vileness, and his life knows neither sorrow nor shame. When he sings to them, men and women listen, and their ears are lulled, but their souls are withered, and they go away faint and full of fever. He is your Apollo Soranus; he has the lyre, indeed, in his hands, but the snakes are about his feet. Why will you listen?”

His eyes grew wistful and full of entreaty; his voice lost its contemptuous anger, and had in it a pathetic pleading. She did not speak, but she held the volume to her, and her face did not lose its resolute coldness.

This silence in her stung him into sharper pain and more bitter earnestness.

“ You have loved Art. Is it Art only to see the canker in the rose, the worm in the fruit, the cancer in the breast, and let all freshness and all loveliness go by uncounted ? Would you go to the pestilence ward to model your Hebe, to the ulcered beggar to mould your Herakles ? Yet that is what he does. Art, if it be anything, is the perpetual uplifting of what is beautiful in the sight of the multitudes—the perpetual adoration of that loveliness, material and moral, which men in the haste and the greed of their lives are everlastingly forgetting ; unless it be that, it is empty and useless as a child’s reed-pipe when the reed is snapt and the child’s breath spent. Genius is obligation. Will you be faithless to that great canon ? The writings of Hilarion will poison your genius, for they will embitter it with doubt and corrupt it with evil teaching. I will not say that as your master I forbid, but I do say that, as your friend, I beseech you to resist his influence. Bid him come here, and I will say the same to him.”

“ You are unjust ; he is a great poet,” she said simply again ; and her face did not change, and

she turned to move away, her hands still clasping the book. She was cold to the eager and ardent supplication of his gaze and his voice ; for indeed there is nothing on earth so cold as is a woman who loves, to all things outside her love ; and this love was in her then, though we knew it not.

Something in that indifferent and tranquil resolution fell on the heart of Maryx as ice falls on fire. The blood burned in his face, and his eyes lit with an ungovernable rage. With a sudden and uncontrollable gesture, he caught the book from her hands, and with an oath he dashed the volume to the ground. His face was dark with furious scorn.

“ Do you call him a poet because he has the trick of a sonorous cadence and of words that fall with the measure of music, so that youths and maidens recite them for the vain charm of their mere empty sound ? It is a lie—it is a blasphemy. A poet ! A poet suffers for the meanest thing that lives ; the feeblest creature dead in the dust is pain to him ; his joy and his sorrow alike outweigh tenfold the joys and the sorrows of men ; he looks on the world as Christ looked on

Jerusalem, and weeps ; he loves, and all heaven and all hell are in his love ; he is faithful unto death, because fidelity alone can give to love the grandeur and the promise of eternity ; he is like the martyrs of the Church who lay upon the wheel with their limbs racked, yet held the roses of Paradise in their hands and heard the angels in the air. That is a poet ; that is what Dante was, and Shelley and Milton and Petrarca. But this man ? this singer of the senses, whose sole lament is that the appetites of the body are too soon exhausted ; this languid and curious analyst who rends the soul aside with merciless cruelty, and puts away the quivering nerves with cold indifference, once he has seen their secrets ?—this a poet ? Then so was Nero harping ! Accursed be the book and all the polished vileness that his verses ever palmed off on men by their mere tricks of sound. This a poet ! As soon are the swine that rout the garbage, the lions of the Apocalypse by the throne of God ! ”

The passionate eloquence natural to him shook him now, as an oak-tree is shaken by a storm. The scorn and the hate that were in him poured

forth their fury on the printed thing as on an emblem and offspring of the man by whom it had been begotten. He thought that it was the false genius which he cursed ; in truth, it was the faithless passion that he foreboded.

Giojà listened, and her young face grew stern as that of the Athene Promachos ; the lines of her mouth curved with a silent severity of pain and wrath. She took the book up from the floor of the room, and held it with clasped hands to her bosom.

“ You are unjust,” she said simply ; and said no more.

Maryx stood silent and breathless, like a man exhausted from some bodily conflict. His breast heaved, and his face grew very pale.

“ I was too violent ; I insulted you ; forgive me,” he muttered very low. “ My dear—I forgot myself—will you forgive me and put your hand in mine ? ”

She looked at him with a look that was almost cruel, so unforgiving and so unresponsive as it was.


“ You are my master, and have been my friend,

otherwise—" she said, slowly, and held out her hand slowly, as she paused.

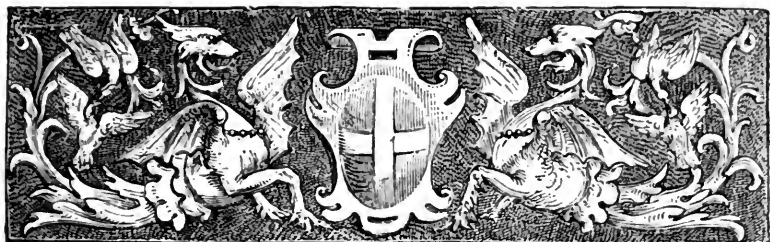
But he motioned her from him with an irrepressible gesture of passionate pain.

"If only *so*—better never," he said, hoarsely. "Leave me unpardoned then. I claim no debts by force."

And he turned and went out of the chamber, and I heard his swift, firm steps echoing over the marble pavement of the atrium, and passing into the gardens that lay without.

"Oh, my dear, my dear! What have you done? how could you wound him so?" I moaned to her, feeling the arrow of her hardness in my heart. There was a great pain in her own eyes, as she turned them on me; they had a dreamy look too, as of one seeing afar off some sweet vision. 

"I am sorry, but I could do no less;—not to be faithful," she said, softly and very low. Then she also went away, holding her book, and left me sorrowful and afraid.



CHAPTER VII.

THE days of joyous, foolish mumming came—the Carnival mumming that as a boy I had loved so well, and that, ever since I had come and stitched under my Apollo and Crispin, I had never been loth to meddle and mix in, going mad with my lit taper, like the rest, and my whistle of the Befana, and all the salt and sport of a war of wits such as old Rome has always heard in mid-winter since the seven nights of the Saturnalia.

Dear Lord! to think that twice a thousand years ago and more, along these banks of Tiber, and down in the Velabrum and up the Sacred Way, men and women and children were leaping, and dancing, and shouting, and electing their festal king, and exchanging their new-year gifts of wax candles and little clay figures: and that

nowadays we are doing just the same thing in the same season, in the same places, only with all the real faunic joyfulness gone out of it with the old slain Saturn, and a great deal of empty and luxurious show come in instead ! It makes one sad, mankind looks such a fool.

Better be Heine's fool on the seashore, who asks the winds their "wherefore" and their "whence." You remember Heine's poem—that one in the "North Sea" series, that speaks of the man by the shore, and asks what is Man, and what shall become of him, and who lives on high in the stars ? and tells how the waves keep on murmuring and the winds rising, the clouds scudding before the breeze, and the planets shining so cold and so far, and how on the shore a fool waits for an answer, and waits in vain. It is a terrible poem, and terrible because it is true.

Every one of us stands on the brink of the endless sea that is Time and is Death ; and all the blind, beautiful, mute, majestic forces of creation move around us and yet tell us nothing.

It is wonderful that, with this awful mystery always about us, we can go on on our little lives as cheerfully as we do ; that on the edge of that mystical shore we yet can think so much about the crab in the lobster-pot, the eel in the sand, the sail in the distance, the child's face at home.

Well, no doubt it is heaven's mercy that we can do so ; it saves from madness such thinking souls as are amongst us.

Now as for our Carnival, foolish no doubt it is, and strange, that, for five-and-twenty hundred years, souls that all that time have held themselves immortal should have liked such pranking and parading, and fooling and fussing. But, all the same, Carnival is pretty, and we Romans are perhaps the only folk since the Milanese who know really how to amuse ourselves in its sports.

Out of place, too, it may be ; yet Rome looks well in the winter's sun, with all the colours of the masquers shining on its great staircases and its vast courts, under the great gloomy walls overtopped with the orange and aloe,

and in the arched passage-ways where the lanterns swing; when costumes by the million flaunt their tinsel and satin at the shop-doors and in the dens of the hucksters, and blow in the breeze with all colours, and in every nook and corner of the old steep streets and the wide piazzas there are groups dancing and sporting, and the thrum of a tambourine to be heard.

One is glad to get away from it all into the quiet of the deserted galleries, or of the ilex avenues of the gardens and woods; but, all the same, Rome looks well, and would have pleased Commodus and Messalina when the riderless horses fly from the Column of the Sun to the Venetian palace, and the war of the lighted tapers wages all down the mile of the Corso under the red-and-white balconies; and there are groups to gladden a painter's soul, if not a sculptor's, where girls in their black masks caper atop of a flight of steps to the sound of a mandoline, and through the gigantic gates of some palace a band of many-coloured roisterers rush into the darkness where the fountains are shining amongst the jagged leaves of the palms and the cactus.

All foolish sights, no doubt, as were the revels of Saturn long ago, yet picturesque and pretty.

In the high days of Carnival Giojà had never gone out often, and never even to the studio, unless accompanied by Maryx or myself. Indeed, little of the riot came near the Ponte Sisto in any way; but still there were always stray groups of maskers twanging their guitars and thumping their tambourines, and the good folk of the Via Giulia and thereabouts were at that time none of the quietest neighbours.

She never could endure to hear the sounds or see the grotesque dresses; the Rome of the past to her was never the actual ancient Rome of the gross Saturnian verses; of the coarse *Ludi Liberales*; of the drunken Matrons of the *Bona Dea*; of the debased populace scrambling and scuffling for the fried meats and the savoury cakes of Domitian.

The Rome of the past was always in her sight chaste, austere, noble, self-contained, as it was actually in the earliest days, when a tuft of grass with earth on the roots was symbol of the highest power, and the voice of Scipio

Nasica was raised against the erection of the theatre as an emasculating spectacle.

This was how she always thought of Rome, and the Carnival crowds were almost worse to her than had been the fish-sellers and the barrow-drivers clamouring round the site of the Porticus Octaviana on that first summer noon which had brought her to the city. Once I had tried to persuade her that the Corso was pretty to behold, with its motley crowds and draped balconies, its flowers and soldiers, its masks and dominoes, its cars and chariots, its resounding music and its mirthful faces; but she would not hear of it.

“It was the Flaminian Way!” she said to me in reproof. “There is only one kind of procession befits it; when the ghosts of the legions come down at nightfall, passing Sulla’s tomb. Do you never see them? Oh, I can see them, whenever you take me there by moonlight.”

And no doubt she could, as Martial’s imagination saw “all Rome” waiting there for Trajan, whilst Trajan was lying dead.

No doubt she could, for her young brain was

full of these things, as other maidens' are of lovers' tales and fortune-tellers' follies.

So she had said all the winter before, and she was never changeable, but in all things only too steadfast.

It was her habit to go into the beautiful old gardens of the Vatican, or of the Albani Villa, or any other of the places where the interest of Maryx secured her free permission to enter, in the noisy boisterous days; or to pass those hours, when all the world was masquerading, in the ilex avenues of the Villa Medici, whence you see St. Peter's through a screen of ilex leaves, and as you pace the cool, leafy, dusky aisles of the clipt box and arching arbutus, seem to be as far removed from all the life that is going on under the million roofs that lie beneath the terrace, as though Rome were a thousand leagues away beyond the mountains.

She had always shunned all sights of the merry, motley life of Carnival, though it is pretty enough seeing the little children run through the old courts, clad in the old costumes of the by-gone days, and the devils, and harlequins, and

soldiers, scaramouches, and crusaders, and troubadours, sitting drinking in the wineshops, or skipping with loud glee down the pavement in the many Teniers-like pictures, all colour and stir, that every tavern, or bakery, or fruitshop show at that time through its arched entrance.

But she saw no beauty in it, and it hurt her like a discordant chord, or a line out of drawing. She liked better to be left alone on the grass before the renaissance housefront of the great Academy, or within doors before the casts of the Braschi Antinous and the Capitoline Juno ; or to pass the day in the Borghese Palace, where Raffaele's frescoes of Alexander's Nuptials are (how pure and perfect are his frescoes, he should never have touched oils !), and through the window in the passage-way you see the fountain up-springing, and through the arch beyond, the trees by Tiber, and know that, within the other rooms close by you are Titian's Graces, and his Loves, and Albano's sporting Seasons, and so many earlier painters' sad sweet Saints, and dying Christs, and that beautiful Presepio of Lorenzo Credi's, of which the world

does not know half enough, and that S. Cecilia of Domenichino's, which they will call a Sybil there, despite her lute and music.

Therefore, she surprised me much on one of the latter days of this Carnival, when I had gone with her, as my old habit was, on such roistering afternoons, into the little garden of the Rospiglioso Casino, which is as sweet a place perhaps as any that we have ; small as it is, it seems to have all mediæval Rome shut in it, as you go up the winding stairs, with all their lichens and water-plants and broken marbles, into the garden itself, with its smooth emerald turf and spreading magnolias, and broad fish-ponds, and orange and citron trees, and the frescoed building at the end where Guido's Aurora floats in unchanging youth, and the buoyant Hours run before the sun.

Myself, I own, I care not very much for that Aurora ; she is no incarnation of the morning, and though she floats wonderfully and does truly seem to move, yet is she in nowise etherial nor suggestive of the dawn either of day or life. When he painted her, he must have been in love with

some lusty taverner's buxom wife busked in her holiday attire.

But whatever one may think of the famed Aurora, of the loveliness of her quiet garden home, safe in the shelter of the stately palace walls, there can be no question; the little place is beautiful, and sitting in its solitude with the brown magnolia fruit falling on the grass, and the blackbirds pecking between the primroses, all the courtly and superb pageant of the dead ages will come trooping by you, and you will fancy that the boy Metastasio is reciting strophes under yonder Spanish chestnut tree, and cardinals, and nobles, and gracious ladies, and pretty pages are all listening, leaning against the stone rail of the central water.

For this is the especial charm and sorcery of Rome, that, sitting idly in her beautiful garden-ways, you can turn over a score of centuries and summon all their pomp and pain before you, as easily as little children can turn over the pages of a coloured picture-book until their eyes are dazzled.

Giojà, I say, startled me as we strolled there

this latest day of February while all the city was alive with masquers, for abruptly, with her face quite pale, and a look as of tears in her eyes, she turned to me and asked me to take her to see the mumming of the streets. We had only been a few minutes in the place ; and were intending to go on, and see the sun set from beside the ruins of the Temple of the Sun in the Colonna gardens, with the pretty pigeons strutting to and fro, and the mass of the Capitol looming beyond the cypresses and the pine boughs on that sunniest terrace, and the grand old war-worn tower of Sta. Caterina lifting itself above the leaves, and far down beneath the ripple of all the falling water, and glow of the scattered gold of the orange trees.

Hence I was more amazed than by anything that could have happened, when, upon this last great Sunday of Carnival, she said to me :

“Take me to see it ; take me somewhere where I shall not be seen myself. You can do that, can you not ?”

I was speechless with surprise ; but then,

reflecting, was rejoiced that anything like a girl's natural interest in merry, foolish things was waking in her.

It was not very easy for me to comply ; for every hole and corner of the Corso is of money's worth on those days ; but I had many friends, and amongst them one good soul, an old apothecary and herb-seller, who had a little old dark nook of a shop projecting into the Corso and looking straight up it into the great square where once senators and patrician women were burned at the stake to light the chariot of Nero, and beyond to the trees and shrubs upon the left where once Cæsar and Pompey were feasted in the Hall of Apollo.

The apothecary had once told me he would let me have for her use one of his dusky, small, cabin-like windows that were wedged in above a great noble's scutcheon and next to a quattrocento portico.

So there I took her before the festival had fairly begun, and there she could sit unseen behind the Pesaro gallipots and the big Faenza jars of sweet and bitter waters, such as might

very well in the old times have held choice poisons for pious cardinals' blessings or the salving of impatient heirs.

No one could see her, for the rich purple and Turkish stuffs of the carpets draping the balcony of the noble's portico, next door, completely screened her from the view of any one.

What did she want to see? Her face was pale, her eyes were intent; it was not the face of a girl come for the first time to a merry spectacle.

My lean and learned old friend, who was like a leech of Molière or Goldoni, looked at her gravely.

"My dear, you look as if you came to some sad sight. Well, perhaps it is one—when one thinks that once the Scipii and the Antonines were applauded here."

But even the allusion did not move her; she sat silent and abstracted, her beautiful eyes watching—for something—like a straining ante-lope's, up and down the slowly-filling Corso.

Music began to sound; clarions to blow; gay colours to mingle together on pretty, foolish

figures ; all the swift shrillness of the Roman clamour began to rise, and the poor fluttering birds tied to the nosegays to be tossed from pavement to casement, and then back again :—for who should care for their sufferings here, poor little simple dwellers on the sweet honeysuckle and acanthus thickets of the wide Campagna ; here, where Zenobia and Vercingetorix, and so many other noble souls had been dragged before them, bound and captive, in the conqueror's wake ?

Giojà sat intent and silent, leaning her chin upon her hands, her arms upon the stone sill of the little window ; the apothecary and I, old men and content to be silent, stood behind her, thinking of mirthful carnivals of our youth, when to pelt foes and friends, and to toss the bladders and to catch the flowers and sweetmeats, and to dance to the twang of our viols, clad in all the colours of the rainbow, was the finest sport of all the jocund year.

An hour and more went by, till the winding street was as fully crowded with trampling horses and jostling throngs as ever it had been on

any triumph of the armies returned from Asia or from Africa under Scipio or Sulla. She still watched, quite motionless; at last I saw a sudden colour in her face, a sudden lightening under the drooped lids of her attentive eyes.

It was the day when the great equipages of the princes and the nobility came forth, gilded and glorious under a rain of flowers.

I looked down into the street; there was a very grand carriage just beneath, nearly smothered in camellias, red and white; lying back in it under that foam of camellia blossoms were Hilarion and the Duchess Sovrana; standing up before them in fanciful disguise was the boy Amphion:—I fancied he looked sullen.

Giojà watched them, the colour burning deeper and deeper in her face, then fading away utterly: she did not move or speak; the carriage stood still a little while, under the pressure of the crowd, and then moved slowly onwards towards Nero's hill.

Amphion had looked up; he alone had found out her face, hidden in the little dark window under the carvings and the stuffs.

He kissed a cluster of camellias and threw it up to her ; it fell short, and was trodden down under the many hurrying feet.

The carriage passed on, Giojà did not move ; she had become white as the marble in which her Nausicaa likeness had been wrought.

I understood now why she had asked to be brought here.

No doubt Amphion had told her, for it seemed to me that he was playing his part in the pageant with an angry and reluctant grace. She never stirred ; she might have been deaf for anything that she appeared to hear of the gay vociferous tumult, and when I looked at her more narrowly I saw the lids were closed over the eyes that still seemed to watch the street.

She sat there throughout the afternoon, the carriage passing thrice ; Amphion threw no more flowers ; Hilarion never lifted his gaze to the little cabin-like window behind the great escutcheon, he was smiling and murmuring indolently in his companion's ear, and casting camellias at the many women that he knew.

When the sunset began to burn red behind the trees of Lucullus's gardens she left the window with a sudden gesture, like one waking cold and numb from a bad dream.

"Can we go home by some bye-street? I am tired."

It was difficult, but out of the back door of the apothecary's little dwelling we got into an open court or yard, thence by a turning into the Via di Ripetta, and so to the quay of Ripetta, where my friend the ferryman was drifting quietly in his ark-like covered boat, as though there were no mad world astir within a rood of him.

Here it was quite dusk; winter mists hung on the river; on the opposite bank the alders were blowing in a chill wind; oxen were dragging timber; some peasants were going on their way to the fields of S. Angelo, where the messengers of the Senate hailed Cincinnatus,—
"May it be well with the Republic and with you!"

"Let us go for a walk; it is a long time since I had one," she said, feverishly, and her voice

had a changed sound in it. "Let us go out there into the country."

"But it is so cold, and nearly dark——"

"What does that matter?" she said, for her, almost irritatedly, for I had always seen in her a perfect sweetness and evenness of temper, not only in large things (where it is easy), but in small ones, which is far more difficult.

I was in the habit of always giving in to her. My old friend, the Charon of Ripetta, nothing loath, took us over the silent, dreary, misty water, and we were soon on the other bank, walking against the bitter wind, then tossing the leafless trees, and through the wet meadows of what used to be the old Navalía, where the galleys that took Rome out on the high seas to her conquests used to be laid up high and dry amongst the rushes and the yellow moly.

She did not speak; she walked straight on, with that swift, fleet, elastic walk, which Maryx was wont to say was worthy of Atalanta.

It was very still and ghostly there; the damp curled up like smoke; the enormous masses of the Vatican and of S. Angelo loomed dully through

the partial darkness ; in the grass of these flat meadows, once the Circus of Nero, frogs and night-jars hooted ; in the leaden dampness and chilliness one seemed to see the Christian virgins slain after passing through worse than death, as Pasiphaë, as Dirce, as Amyone ; one seemed to see the Mercury coming and touching each naked corpse with his red-hot caduceus to test if any lingering life might yet make torture sweet, and finding any, calling the masked slaves to drag the bodies out by their feet, and end them with a mallet, Nero and the pretty painted dames smiling all the while.

“ Let us go back,” I said to her. “ This place is miserable at night ; one fancies one meets ghostly things ; all this earth was soaked through and through with blood ; — come away.”

But she did not appear to hear ; she was moving through the wet rank grass with her head bare to the wind.

“ Is she a good woman or a bad ? ” she asked suddenly.

“ What woman, my dear ? ” — here it seemed

to me as if one could only think of Poppea—poor, pretty, frail, imperial Poppea, “a fury with a face of the Graces.”

“The one with him,” she said, simply.

“Oh!—good? bad? those words are strong; most men, and women too, are best described by neither, they fall betwixt the two; we are not in Nero’s times, when there was Nero, yet there was Paul also. Let us turn back; the night is very cold.”

“Is she good or bad?” she said, with her usual insistance.

“A great dame; a faithless wife; a princess and a jade; a common type of that world of theirs; not worth your thought; you are far off in higher air ——”

“A bad woman then?”

“My dear, in their world they do not use these words. Were she a taverner’s or carpenter’s wife she would be called bad no doubt, and her husband would use sharp steel if only to be no more the laughing-stock of neighbours. But they have other logic in that greater world. With us a jade is a jade, but there their reasonings are

more complex, as befits more cultivated folk. Why talk of any such matters? You do not understand the thing that a bad woman is;—or high or low.”

“ Yes, I understand :—but why do men love them ? ”

“ Ah ! Let us call up the shades of the Antonines, and question them.”

She was silent.

“ They do not always love,” I added. “ Sometimes they hate, but that holds them just as well or even better : men are made so ; as for why, —ask Hermes ; or as Christians say, the devil.”

She did not answer, but walked on through the wet fields where Cincinnatus had left the plough to serve his city, only that in a few hundred years Caligula and Caracalla might come after him and be masters of the world. Oh, grim derision that callest thyself History ! Pondering on the bitterness of thy innumerable ironies, thy endless chronicle of failures, the bravest and the humblest soul might almost ‘ curse God and die ! ’

The pains that men have been at to make mankind most miserable! and the little that heroism or virtue ever have been able to do to make them happy!

“Why speak of love at all then?” she said, in a low voice that had scorn in it. “Love is not born so.”

“My dear, of love there is very little in the world. There are many things that take its likeness: fierce unstable passions and poor egotisms of all sorts, vanities too, and many other follies—*Apatê* and *Philotês* in a thousand masquerading characters that gain great Love discredit. The loves of men, and women too, my dear, are hardly better very often than *Minos*’ love for *Skylla*; you remember how he threw her down from the stern of his vessel when he had made the use of her he wished, and she had cut the curls of *Nisias*. A great love does not of necessity imply a great intelligence, but it must spring out of a great nature, that is certain; and where the heart has spent itself in much base petty commerce, it has no deep treasury of gold on which to draw; it is bankrupt from its very

over-trading. A noble passion is very rare; believe me; as rare as any other very noble thing."

"Yes: I can believe that."

Her voice sounded tired and feebler than usual, and her steps grew slower.

"Yet Sospitra was happier," she added, "dying and having known love, than living loveless with all the knowledge that all the powers of the earth and air could bring to her."

The accursed poem had sunk into her mind with that force which came from the great truth that it embodied.

"Sospitra is a mere fancy and figure," I said to her, "and he who wrote it made the world weep with it no doubt, but never spared a woman for its sake. He is like Phineus, whom Poseidon punished; he has the high gifts of prophecy and of golden wisdom, but two harpies are always with him that breathe on the sweetest and the simplest food, and taint it when he touches it. His harpies are Satiety and Disbelief."

“ The fresh winds drove the harpies away,” she said, softly, “ drove them away for ever into their caverns in Krete.”

“ Because Phineus prayed for the winds and the Argonauts.—Hilarion does not pray ; to him his harpies are welcome.”

She made me no reply ; I heard her sigh ; she walked on against the wind, baring her head to it with a sort of eagerness and letting it blow in amongst her hair.

You may walk thence straight on between the hedges and the fields until the road begins to rise, and climb the sloping side of what was once the Clivus Cinnæ ; it is lovely there in the spring-time, or later, when all the grass is full of violets and fritillaria, and the fragrant yellow tulip, and all the darkling blue of the borage tribe, whilst through the boles of the ancient cork and ilex trees you look and see the purple gleaming cupola of St. Peter's lifted against the sky, and the dome of Agrippa, and the Alban hills ; but at night the road is dull and dreary, dark, and not very safe.

I was glad when she did not notice that I

turned back to cross the river—she not heeding where we went.

I stumbled on, taking a homeward way through the mists and the gloom, while across on the other side of the Tiber one could see the serpent-like curving of the line of light where Carnival was rioting, and some faint bray of trumpets and noise of drums came confusedly to us through the vaporous night; there were pyrotechnic showers of all colours going up into the darkness to please the crowds of Rome; they rose from the square by the tomb of Augustus where Livia sat by the burning pile for seven nights and seven days, disrobed, and with her hair loose upon the wind, whilst the freed eagle cleft the air and rose above the flames.

We went homeward in silence, still along the shore and over our own bridge to where the water was falling, pale and beautiful, in the deserted place.

“Good night, dear friend,” she said, softly, and her voice sounded to me unsteady and low as if from tears.

I went heavy-hearted to my nook in the street by my stall, where I slept.

He had cast his glamour on her, and the poison had sunk into her, and of what use was the shield of Athene Ergane now?

I sat by my little lamp, and the hours were sad to me.

The echoes of the boisterous revelries came dully to me; the lights of the coloured fires made the sky ruddy and golden above the dark domes and roof; over the bridge and down the street gay groups came dancing, maskers with bladders and lutes in their hands.

Genius had given her the clue and the sword, and what use would they be to her, I thought. She would give them away, throw them down at his feet, and so perish herself—the gods are weak and men are cruel.

For I grew stupid and sleepy with fatigue, and heavy-hearted with a vague sore dread; and my eyes closed, and thus I did not see who came out from the house on the bridge.



CHAPTER VIII.

Now, as afterwards I learned, when she went up the stairs it was quite dusky, and even dark, for the three-wicked lamp had only one burner lighted, and there was no fire on the hearth either, Ersilia being a woman at all times very careful in such little matters, observing justly that the great things concerned the good God, but the little ones were all our own, as the good God sent the tempest, and there was no getting out of it, but if our sock or our smock were in rags the fault was our own, and easily to be mended with a needle.

So, there being no light to speak of, she went forward without seeing anything except the dim outline of Hermes, and she was touched by the

soft cool hands of Hilarion ere she had perceived that anyone was there.

“Abroad in this damp and chilly night!” he said, tenderly. “Is that wise for yourself or kind to those who care for you?——”

She started away from him and stood silent.

Her face was quite pale, her hair wet with the mists, her eyes were dim and dilated, coming out of the cold and the darkness.

“Let us light the fire; you are chilled to the bone,” he said, softly taking her hands once more, but she withdrew them quickly. “Chills in our old Rome are dangerous. Who has been with you? Crispin? He should be wiser with all his weight of years. I have had a wearying and stupid day; what is more stupid than the noise of crowds? I came, hoping for an hour’s rest;—must I go away? I shall not go unless you force me.”

And he bent down over the brushwood and fir apples on the stone of the old open fireplace, and busied himself with making the flame rise, and lit the other wicks of the oil lamp, and threw before the hearth a rug of skins

that he had brought up from his carriage a little before, and the light beginning to warm and glow in the chamber, lighted up a great basket of roses that he had set on the floor.

“Sit down,” he said, gently, and she obeyed him, sinking on the oaken settle; still quite silent, the mist of her damp hair like a pale circling nimbus around her head: she was used to see him there, and it did not seem strange to her.

“These are the tea-roses that you like,” he went on, kneeling on one knee on the hearth, and putting some of the flowers on her lap. “These large crimson ones are the Marshal Bugeaud; how barbaric to give a name of war to so much fragrance! and this is the Belle Marguerite, and this the Narcissus, and this is Hymen; see how golden and brilliant and perfumed it is!—and this, so pure and white, is my favourite of them all, the Niphétos; the Niphétos is like you, I think, as you look now, you are so pale—Did you think I did not see you in that little window this afternoon? The boy threw you camellias. I would not throw

you blossoms that were for all the world. I would not even look at you—being where I was. It would have been profanation.”

All the colour came back in a second into her face; her cheeks burned; her eyes dropped.

“Why were you there then?” she said, very low, but with a firm voice—then paused as if afraid.

Hilarion smiled, stooping for more roses, so that she did not see the smile.

“Because men are fools, my dear,” he said, gravely. “Because we are no wiser than the poor silly greenfinches, that the Thuringian foresters net, by no better trap than a little bit of mirror set amongst the river rushes. Past follies have present obligations: and old sins have long shadows—but what do you know of those things? Believe me I was weary enough——”

She looked at him; then looked away.

The truth and strength of her own nature made her doubt; the innocence and candour of her own nature made her believe. And of sophism such as his she had no conception, and from

such a subject, vague as it was to her, she shrank by instinct.

“You did not seem weary,” she said, with an aching pain in her voice.

Hilarion smiled.

“My child, do not take the face of a man for more than a mask—in public. When he is alone, look in his eyes and trust them.”

“But Amphion said that you—loved her!”

She spoke very low and with a sort of shame.

Hilarion’s face grew dark.

“Does he prate—the Greek boy? Let him keep his breath for his flute. What more did he tell you?”

“Not much more. Only that you would be with her there to-day; as you were.”

“And was that why you went?”

“I wished to see her.”

Her face grew paler again and resolute, and her mouth had its curve of scorn, which Maryx had not put into his Nausicaa’s. She was not aware of all that she expressed by that wish. She only said the truth as she always said it, when she spoke at all.

Hilarion busied himself with his roses. Then kneeling there, he took one hand of hers between his own, and rested them with the roses on her lap.

“Perhaps I loved her, as I have loved many, with passions that you cannot guess, so vile they are and poor and base,—for men are made so. Do you despise me that I own it?——”

“I do not know,” she murmured; her colour changed, she trembled from head to foot, she did not look at him. She did not know what she felt; only it hurt her like a stabbing knife that he should speak so: and how, she marvelled, could Love be ever base?

For of Philotès she knew nothing.

“Do you think I love her *now*?” he said, and looked up at her in the dim firelight, the dewy leaves of the roses, and the brilliance of his own eyes, close to her drooping face in the soft shadows.

Her heart beat violently; her limbs shook; she was terrified; she could not have told why; she sprang upon her feet, letting the flowers fall, and taking her hands away.

“What do you think?” he said, with soft insistence, still kneeling there, and watching all the tumultuous pain in her with pleasure.

She stood erect, white and still, with her heart so loudly beating that he could hear it in the silence of the chamber.

“What can I tell?” she muttered. “Love—is it not always Love? It cannot change, I think;—and you were there to-day.”

He smiled, and his eyes had a gleam in them that was half derision and half regret.

“Dear,—men have many loves; their true names are, or vice, or vanity, or feebleness, or folly, or many another that is not fitting for your ears. But the love you think of—that comes but seldom, and comes to few. I wrote of love all my life long; nothing knowing of it,—till I came to you. Are you cold to me—are you against me—that you stand so still and pale?—”

And all the while he knew so well!

Her eyes dilated like a hunted stag’s; her breath came fast and loud; a mortal fear possessed her; she put her hands to her heart.

“ I am afraid ! ” she cried, and trembled, as though with the cold of the night.

Hilarion stooped his head where she knelt, and kissed her feet softly.

“ Afraid ? Of me ? ”

“ Of myself ! ”—then with a wonderful light and glory quivering on all her face, and changing it as the break of day changes the earth and sky, she stretched her arms out to the shadows round her, as if in an oath to some great unseen god.

“ It will be all my life ! ” she said, with a sob in her throat, yet the glory of the morning in her eyes.

He understood.

He rose, and kissed her on the mouth.





CHAPTER IX.

EARLY in the morning of the next day I was sitting at my stall, working by such grim light as there was, for it was a grey and gusty day, and the fountain sounded cold and chill, and Palès shivered despite all the straw, and there was a discordant blare of trumpets somewhere near that made one think of Seneca and his sore trouble in the showman's bugle playing.

There was not a creature astir near me; people were tired after the night's frolicking, and were lying a-bed to begin their capers afresh with spirits when noontide should be passed. I worked on in silence undisturbed, a few flakes of snow falling on the heads of Crispin and of Crispian above mine.

Suddenly, a little figure running fast down the

Via Giulia, paused by me ; it was a pretty figure, all in a Carnival disguise of mediæval minstrelsy, shivering sadly now, and splashed with mud.

“Amphion !” I called out, in amaze, as Palès began snarling at his slender ankles.

It was indeed the lad ; jaded and tremulous, very cold, and very pitiful to see.

“He has turned me out !” he moaned like a child of seven years old. “Without a word, without a sign—only told me to go, and never dare return. What have I done ? Oh, what have I done ?”

“You have angered Hilarion ?” I asked him, not surprised, for very often his caprices ended thus ; and I remembered the poor dog he had killed.

“I do not know !” the boy sobbed, “I have done nothing. Nothing, nothing ! When he came back last night, it was very late, he had told me to wait for him, so I had not dared undress ; he looked at me—just looked !—but it was like the blue lightning, just as cruel and as cold ; then he put his hand on my collar, and led me out of the great doors. ‘Go out of Rome,

and never dare return,'—that was all he said. He put a roll of money in my vest—here it all is—but not another word did he ever say, but shut the doors himself upon me. It was nearly dawn. It was snowing. It was so bitterly cold. I came to you. I do not know where to go ; what to do,—I have no friends !——”

I looked at the money : it was a roll of notes for a heavy sum—enough to keep the lad a year or more.

“ You must have displeased him,” I said ; “ and it is very like him to do so. He never wastes words on what displeases him. But it was cruel. He can be cruel.”

Poor little Amphion was sobbing all the while, his gay dress all splashed and torn, his dark curls tumbled ; his olive cheek blue with cold.

It was of no use to press him more ; if he knew or guessed what had caused his expulsion, he would not say it ; he was a Greek. All one could do was to shelter him, and take care of the money, and send him back to his own home.

As for speaking to Hilarion, past experience told me the uselessness of that.

Yet of course I tried it; whenever did the known futility of anything prevent one from essaying it, or whenever was past experience enough deterrent?

I warmed and fed the lad in the little den near the fountain, which I had taken to sleep in since giving up my Hermes chamber; then I went and sought Hilarion.

He was at those rooms in one of the old palaces of which the boy had spoken. There was difficulty in seeing him. They brought word first that he was not there, and then many very various excuses.

Not being easily baffled, and being convinced that there he was, I said nothing, but sat down on the steps to watch his coming.

There were a grand staircase, and old stone lions, and a lovely little green garden, then all in a golden glow with oranges, and with one of the few palms of Rome leaning under its green diadem in their midst. Along one side of it ran a frescoed casino like the one of Rospigliosi, in which Aurora and the rosy Hours are.

After waiting a long time, I saw him in that

casino. I made straight to him. It might be fancy, but I thought he turned paler and looked guilty as his eyes lighted on me. Evidently he would have avoided me, but he could not do so.

“Perhaps I have no right to speak to you; but I cannot help myself,” I began to him. “That poor little fellow, whom you call Amphion—is his offence so great?”

It did not strike me at the time, but I remembered later that his face cleared and he looked relieved as of some apprehension of annoyance.

“Dear Crispin,” he said with a little smile. “That is so like you! Why waste your morning and disturb your peace? Has the boy been to you?”

I told him, and begged for the poor little culprit with the best eloquence I knew.

Hilarion heard indifferent; patient out of courtesy to me, but I could see no yielding in his face. He was looking at the frescoes on the wall near him, and pulling the orange-blossoms.

He heard me till my breath and my zeal both paused panting. Then he spoke :

“The boy has nothing to complain of ; I have given him enough money to keep him for two years. I have done with him. That is all. If you are his friend, put him in the first vessel that sails for Greece. Only take care he come near me no more. Do you know these frescoes are disputed ? But I am nearly sure they are Masaccio’s. He was in Rome, you know, some little time. I think I shall buy this house.”

“After all,” he went on, finding me silent, “there is no life like a Roman prince’s ; like life at all, indeed, in these grand old palaces of yours. Even the motley modern world gains grandeur from them, and even modern society itself looks like a pageant of the renaissance when the ambassador or the noble receives it in his great galleries rich in Raffaelle’s, and Guido’s, and Guercino’s frescoes, and with all the lustre of that splendid age still lingering on the sculptured walls, and on the velvet dais, and all its light and laughter hiding with the Cupids amongst the flowers on the panelled mirrors ; and all its majesty still abiding in the immense domes and stairs and halls

where kings might marshal their armies, or the very archangels summon their heavenly hosts. Oh ! there is no life like it : in these cool marble chambers, with their lovely pale frescoes, and their open courts, and their fountains, and their gardens, it is not difficult to forget the time we live in, and to think that Lucrezia is going by with her two hundred ladies, and their horses, and their cavaliers ; or to shut the shutters and light the lamps, and in these noble rooms, where floor and ceiling and wall and casement are all masterpieces of the arts, think that Bernardo Accolti is reading aloud to us by torchlight with his guard of honour round him. Oh ! there is no life like the life of Rome : a woman going to her ball seems on these stairways like Veronica Gambara herself, and when you look in the glass, a little Love of Mario dei Fiori throws roses at you from it, and when you open your window you see a palm, or a god, or a lion of Egypt under a colossal arch, and the stars shine through the orange-leaves, and the lute in the street sounds magical, and the gardener's daughter crossing the court looks like a

pale sweet Titian of the Louvre. There is no life like the life in Rome. I shall purchase this palace."

"But what could a little lad so young have done?" I argued, foolishly, and having no patience to hear his picturesque discursive talk.

Hilarion played with the orange-flowers.

"Have you anything more to say to me; for I am going to Daila, and am pressed for time?"

"But he is so young, and all alone——"

"Dear Crispin, when I am tired, I am tired; and I am tired of flute-playing, that is all. There is no more to be said. Ask me anything for yourself, and you know I am glad to grant it always. But leave my own affairs to my own fancies. I think I shall buy this place, if only for the sake of these frescoes; the damp is hurting them. And there are some Overbecks upstairs in the great hall, dry and cold and joyless, but still very fine in drawing. Walk up and look at them, and forgive me if I seem rude to hurry from you——"

And so he went, seeming desirous to escape

my importunity, but courteous and even kindly, though quite unyielding, as I had known him twenty and twice twenty times before.

I did not go and look at the Overbecks. I went back vexed and dispirited, having wasted my forenoon, as he had said.

I found the poor little flute-player warming himself over my brazier.

“You had best go seaward, and get home,” I said to him sadly.

But the boy set his small pearly teeth tight.

“No. I will stay in Rome, but he shall not know it.”

“How can you do that?”

“I have enough money.”

“But it is his money—you can hardly do what he forbids with that.”

“What do you mean?” said Amphion, with an evil gleam in his soft dark indolent eyes.

“When anyone has given you a blow, it does not matter whether it is their own knife or not that you take out of their girdle to give it back with—at least so they say where I come from——”

“Give back a blow?—hush, hush! what vengeance should you take, my poor little girlish lad? And besides, those are evil thoughts, Amphion, and he is only a patron, and capricious—such men always are.”

He clasped his slender hands about the brazen vessel with the ashes in, and his pretty face looked pinched, and sullen, and changed.

“In those tales she read me,” he said, slowly, “the hero slew twelve of their enemies to please his dead friend; and she thought that right and great; and it was a Greek did it. I know what I know. I can wait.”

I thought it boyish prattling, and thought that it would pass; so let him be.

But there was more purpose in him than I supposed; for that very night, without saying anything to me, he slipped off his gay clothes, and cut his dark curls, and made himself look like any other of the little brown half-clad fisher lads swarming about the bank of the populous Tanner’s Quarter, and hid his money heaven knew where, and hired himself out as if he had none, to a fisherman of the Rione, who spent life

watching his *girella*, and pulling his skiff to and fro between the arches of Ponte Sisto and Quattro Capi.

The boy would hardly say more than a mute, and was unhandy, and delicate as a girl, though at home in the water from childish habits in his own archipelago; but I suppose he used his money adroitly, for the fisherman never called him to account for laziness or clumsiness, but let him do very much as he liked, making a pretence of lying on the damp ground to watch the fish sweep with the current into the nets, or pulling the little boat about round the Tiberine Isle, and under the Temple of Vesta.

Amphion shunned me, and never went near Giojà, and I did not think it was my business to betray him, so I let things be, and often after dusk a flute as sweet as a nightingale's song made music under the piles of the bridge of Sextus, sighing through the dark in answer to my faun in the fountain.

But Giojà took no notice. I do not suppose that she even heard. There was so much melody at twilight all about there; from guitars thrum-

ming in balconies, and tambourines ringing in tavern doorways, and students singing as they passed from shore to shore, and fishermen as they set their nets ; and in her own heart, then, there was that perpetual music which makes the ear deaf to every other harmony or discord : the music which is never heard but once in life.

But of this I then knew nothing.

I only saw that her step was elastic, that her eyes were full of light, that her face had lost that deep and troubled sadness which it had never been without before since the day that she sought Virgilian Rome and found but ruin. I was glad, and never thought to trace the change to its true source. She was more silent than ever, and more than ever seemed to like to be alone ; but she was occupied on a new and greater work than her Penthesileia, and I supposed that this absorbed her.

I was used to the way of artists, and knew that true Art allows no friends ; it is like Love. One day Love comes, and then slighted friendship is avenged.

The monumental sculpture of Greece was very

true in its allegories—where the young lovers, led by Love, walk hand-in-hand, veiled, and not seeing whither their steps lead ; is that not as true to-day as it was three thousand years ago? And yet again, where Love burns the butterfly in the flame of the altar and turns his head away, weeping, so as not to see the pain that he is causing? As Love was then, so is Love now. These allegories have lost nothing of their sweet and bitter truth through Time. Love burns up the soul. He may weep, yet he is ruthless. Never more can the wings rise that he has laid in ashes in the fire. And where he leads, needs must the led follow, blinded and deliriously content, and the end of the path none know but he.

Meanwhile, of Hilarion I had no serious thought; for I never saw him pass Ersilia's door, and indeed he seemed to me to be more than ever with his imperial jade the Duchess.

One evening the people were coming out from the great church of the Trinity of the Pilgrims hard by my fountain, and there was a smell of incense on the air, and a sound of chaunting everywhere, because it was in the days of Lent,

and mirthful King Carnival had gone to his grave and Pasquino back to his solitude ; and that evening as I sat stitching, communing with my own thoughts, and not liking them, because of late they had got confused and cloudy, and I had a sense of impending woe without any corresponding sense of how to meet and to prevent it, Giojà came to me as her habit had used to be, though of late she had changed it, and touching me gently said to me :

“ Let us go for one of our old walks. Will you not take me ? The sun is setting.”

Palès leaped for joy, and I rose in obedience, glad as the dog was to see her return to one of our old familiar customs, that of late had been abandoned, as the vague restraint of an unexplained estrangement had grown up between her and me.

She was very silent as we walked, but that was usual with her ; for unless strongly moved she had never been given to many words.

We came away through the vegetable market, and the windy square, dedicated to Jesus, and so past the Hill of the Horse, as we call it, to our

favourite Colonna gardens, where she and I had spent many a pleasant quiet hour, with Rome outspread like a map at our feet, and the iron gates closed between us and the outer world.

We sat down on the upper terrace, where the pigeons and the geese pace amongst the flowers, and the pine stem stands that was set there when Rienzi died, and that brave old tower rears itself above the ilexes against the blue sky, which the people will call the Tower of Nero, though Nero never beheld it.

She leaned there as she had done a hundred times, looking down on to the shelving masses of verdure, and across the bare wilderness of roofs that seem to rise one on another, like the waves of a great sea arrested and changed to stone, with the sky-line always marked by the distant darkness of the pines and the dome of St. Peter's against the light.

“If one lived in it a thousand years, could one exhaust Rome!” she said below her breath.

“Always I loved it; but now——”

She paused; and I, coward-like, fool-like, did

not ask her what she meant, because I shrank from every chance of hearing the name of Hilarion on her lips. God forgive me ! If only I had known——

The pretty pigeons, blue and bronze and white, came pecking and strolling round us, looking up with their gemlike eyes for the crumbs that we were used to bring them.

“I forgot their bread, I am sorry,” she said, looking down on them, and she stroked the soft plumage of one that she had always especially caressed, and which would let her handle it.

“Will you do something for me ?” she said, holding the bird to her breast, as she had held the Sospitra. “That is what I wanted to ask you. I have not seen Maryx since that day when you said that I wounded him. I have been to the studio, but he is never there. Listen : he was wrong and unjust, and it was not to me that the insult was, but to what he spoke of ; yet he has been so good to me, and I can never repay it, and I seem thankless, and he will not understand. Will you tell him for me that I can bear no bitterness in my heart against him, and that

the gratitude I give to him will never change ? Will you tell him ? ”

“ My dear, it is not gratitude that he wants,” I said, and then paused ; for after all I scarcely dared to speak for him, since for himself he was silent. “ It is not gratitude that he wants ; great natures do not think of that. They act nobly as mean ones meanly, by their instinct, as the eagle soars and the worm crawls. Maryx would be glad of your faith, of your obedience, of your affection, for indeed you owe him much ; I do not mean such vulgar debt as can be paid by any feeling of mere obligation, but such debt as may well be borne by one frank and pure nature from another, and can be only paid by loyal love.”

And then I stopped for fear of saying too much, because I had no warrant from him, and a certain look of alarm and of distaste that came upon her face arrested me.

She did not answer me for a few moments, but bent her face over the bird she held.

“ I shall seem thankless to him, and you,” she said sorrowfully, and then was still and seemed to draw her words back as remembering

some order not to speak. She laid her hand upon my arm, the hand which had held the drooping poppies that day when I had seen her first.

“Pray tell him I am thankful, always thankful,” she said with a tremor in her voice. “He has been very good to me, good beyond all my own deserving—and you too. If ever I pain you, you will forgive me, will you not? For so long as I shall live I shall remember always how you sheltered me in that time of wretchedness, and all the peaceful days that you have given me.”

The bird struggled from her breast and flew to regain its fellows; hot tears had fallen from her eyes upon its burnished sapphire head and seared it. I gazed on her, touched to my soul, yet troubled.

“Why my child, why my dear, you speak as though you were going to join those gods you love, and leave us and Rome desolate!” I murmured, with a poor attempt at lightness of heart and speech; “but as for what I did for you—it was nothing, you forget my dream, you know I

could do no less for you, my Ariadnê, come from the shades to earth."

Her hand fell from my arm ; her face changed.

"Do not call me by that name, I loathe it," she said, with a sudden impatience ; "I am not like her. I never can have been like her, and Homer is too kind to her by far ! Let us go home now. You will tell Maryx what I said. I would not pain him. But he will never understand——"

"He understands well enough," I said bitterly, for something in her tone had stung me. "He understands that two years of purest devotion to every highest interest of yours weighs as nothing in the scale beside a few forced hothouse roses and a few hectic idle poems ; he understands that well."

"You are unjust," she said, merely, as she had said it to Maryx, and she walked slowly away from the sunny terrace, down between the high walls of ilex and arbutus, and so homeward.

I did not speak any more. I felt angered against her, and heaven forgive me ! I did not know——. Silently and sadly I followed her through all the narrow crooked noisy passages

and streets till we reached the familiar shadow of our Holy Trinity of Pilgrims, and going a little farther were at home.

At the bridge where Ersilia's house-entrance gaped wide open, she stood still, and held her hands out to me once again.

"Forgive me," she said, very low under her breath.

I thought she meant me to forgive her impatience of my rebuke, and I took her hands, so fair and slender and unworn, tenderly within my own, that were so hard and brown and furrowed.

"Dear, where we love much, we always forgive, because we ourselves are nothing, and what we love is all."

"Thank you," she said softly, and let her hands linger in mine, then she passed away from me into the darkness and the coldness of the house.

I went back to my stall, and though I was troubled yet I was relieved, because she had given me gentle words to bear to Maryx, if they were not all one could have wished. The Faun

sang me a song in the fountain as I sat under the wall of the old monastic hospital that had sheltered me so many years.

I heard the song for the last time.





CHAPTER X.

Now it came to pass that the evening following when I was sitting at my stall, having lit my lamp to see to finish a more delicate piece of work than common, I felt weary and out of spirits, I could not have well told why, and sat sighing as I stitched; sighing in my own meditations, for the blithe old days when a hand at cards and a flask of wine, and a merry companion had made bright the winter nights to me, and the finding of an evangelarium in the mediæval Greek or Latin, or of a broken seal-ring or a fragment of a marble hand, made me so happy that I would not have changed places with a king, as I tramped in the snow or the mud, through the darkling streets of Rome.

Now I felt heavy hearted; all my quarter was

empty; the people were gone to the Piazza Navona, where a mid-Lent fair was, with the booths, and the fun, and the frolic, and a year or so before I should have gone too, and laughed with the loudest in the old Circus Agonalis around Domitian's obelisk, with the splash and sparkle of Bernini's fountains, reflecting the changing lights of the little coloured lamps.

As it was, I sat and stitched, and Palès slept, and the stars began to come out above Tiber, in clear cold skies that were cloudless.

It was so entirely still that a step coming down over the bridge made me look up; I saw Maryx as I have seen him many a time in a score of years since in the days of his youth he had made my Apollo Sandaliarius.

He paused by my stall :

"Is she not well, that she has not been to me of late?" he asked.

A vague trouble began to stir in me.

"Has she not been?" I asked him. "No; I have heard nothing."

"But you have not seen her to-day?"

"No, but often the day passes—"

I did not end the phrase, fearing to seem to blame her; for indeed it pained me that of late she had so very seldom come to lean her hands on my board, and ask how things went with me, and beg me to go and sit with her in Hermes' room; or wander through the streets, as before the last few months it had been so constantly her habit to do that I had grown used to it, and missed it as an old dog will miss the pleasure of a walk.

Maryx stood silent, while the light from my lamp fell on his noble face, which was flushed and troubled.

"I spoke to her wrongly a month ago," he said at last. "It was base in me, and very unworthy. It is not for me to depreciate his genius. It is not for me, if she find beauty in it, to say her nay; beauty there is, and if she do not see the foulness beneath it—so be it. To the pure all things are pure. I would ask her pardon. Perhaps I have driven her away. Shall I find her in her room?"

My heart leaped with joy.

"Of course!" I said hastily; "and you were

in no way to blame, and it is only like your nobleness; and she is worthy of it, for she, too, repents and regrets that moment of cold words. Look! She bade me say so to you only yesterday, in the Colonna gardens. She said, 'Will you tell him for me that I can have no bitterness in my heart for him, and that my gratitude will never change.' That is what she said; the tears in her eyes the while. She was too proud or too shy to say so to you herself. But her heart is tender, and if you put out your hand, she will give hers now—ah, so gladly—that I know!"

So I spoke, like a fool as I was.

Maryx looked at me with a beautiful light and warmth upon his face.

"Is that indeed true? or do you say it to make me deceive myself? Better all pain—all life-long pain—than any self-deception."

"Nay, it is true; that I swear. Go you and hear her say it again. She does repent herself."

"I would take nothing from mere obedience, mere sense of gratitude," he muttered; but

the light of love was still in his eloquent eyes.

“Go you yourself to her,” said I, laughing, like the foolish thing I was, and got up and went quickly before him across the street to Ersilia’s door: “For now,” I said to myself, “he will speak straightly to her, and all will be well between them for ever.”

But at the door Pippo, leaning there smoking, swore that the girl was not within, nor had she been seen all day, he said. I looked up at Maryx. His face seemed to me to be stern, and pale, and disquieted.

“Let us ask Ersilia,” he said; and I went with him into the house.

“Has she not been to you?” said Ersilia, coming out with a lamp held over her head. “Oh, yes; she left here this forenoon, quite early, as her habit is; I thought she was still up yonder with your marbles.”

Then a great and sore trouble fell upon us that was the beginning of the end.

Maryx never spoke. He went with swift strides up to the chamber, and entered it, for

the door had no lock. The light from the newly-risen moon, that hung above his own Golden Hill, streamed soft and pallid across Hermes, and left the rest of the empty space in darkness.

She was not there. He struck a light, and searched the room, but there was nothing to show any intention of departure and no word whatever of farewell. Only the beautiful head that she had drawn in black and white of Hilarion as the poet Agathon was no longer in its place against the wall.

There is something in the silence of an empty room that sometimes has a terrible eloquence : it is like the look of coming death in the eyes of a dumb animal ; it begs words and makes them needless.

Palès following raised her head and gave a long, low, wailing moan, that echoed woefully through the stillness in which only the lapping of the water against the stones of the bridges was to be heard, and the stroke of a single oar that was stirring the darkness somewhere near.

Maryx looked at me, and there was that in his

look which frightened me. He pointed to the empty place upon the wall.

“She is gone with him,” he said : that was all : and yet in the sound of his voice it seemed to me that I heard speaking all the despair of a great life ruined and made valueless.

I broke out into God knows what wild protests and breathless denials ; I would not let such a thing be said, be thought possible, for one single moment ; she was so far above all touch of man, all weakness or passion or unwisdom of woman, it was impiety, profanation, folly, hatefulness, to hint such things or dream them. Was he mad ?

Maryx stood there quite motionless ; his face was white as his own marbles, and very rigid. All my passion passed him and left him unmoved as the winds leave the rocks.

“She has gone with him,” he said again ; and his lips were dry and moved, as it were, with difficulty, and his great brown eyes, so brilliant and so bold, grew black with heavy wrath and desperate pain.

“Do you not see ? ” he muttered, “do you not

see ? Whilst we thought her a holy thing, he all the time—”

And he laughed—a terrible laugh.

The moon was on the face of Hermes ; the mouth seemed to smile in pity and derision.





CHAPTER XI.

MARYX stood quite silent and quite still.

I raved, and my own raving words fell back on my own ears and made me dumb again ; and only the wailing of the dog at the moon, that was shining in the sky and on the river, filled the chamber.

I did not believe ; I would not believe ; I thrust all possibility of belief away from me as so much blasphemy and infamy against her ; and yet all the while I knew that he was right, as you know that some ghastly sorrow is on its way to you long ere the day dawns that actually brings it.

“ Why should you say so—why, why, why ? ” I said over and over again, till the words lost all sense to one. “ She has gone astray somewhere in some old haunt of Rome, or fallen asleep, or

ill, in some gallery of Capitol or Vatican ; you know her ways ; she dreams amongst the marbles till she is almost a statue like them. That is it ; oh, that is it—nothing more. We shall meet her coming through the darkness if we go into the streets, and then how she will smile at us—only she must never know. Why, Palès will find her ; Palès is wiser than you are ; Palès knows—”

And then I broke down and laughed and sobbed, and struck my head with my own hands, thinking of that day when my Ariadnê had come to my stall in the summer noon, with the poppies and the passion-flowers in her hand ; and Ariadnê had the clue and the sword, and gave them up and drifted away into a common love and common fate of women, sought and then forsaken—

Nay !—this could not be hers.

“No! oh, thrice no!” I screamed. “Ariadnê ? It was but a jest to call her so, you know ; a fancy and a jest ; the gods could not be so cruel as to make it true ; just for a dream, an old man’s foolish dream in the hot sunshine !”

“Come !” said Maryx, and grasped me with his fine and slender hands as in a vice of iron,

and thrust me from the threshold down the stairs.

“Where would you go?” I stammered; “into the streets?—to the Capitol, that would be best; she loves it so, and will sit thinking there for hours. She is shut in some gallery there; oh, yes, that I am sure. Come to the Capitol, or, if not, to the Pio-Clementino; she so often gets away amongst the marbles, that you know—”

“Are you a madman?” said Maryx. “Come with me to him.”

And he drove me with that grip upon my arm to the palace where the frescoes were in the garden, but of Hilarion there was nothing to be heard; he had not been there that day.

We went to Daila.

The night grew very cold; there had been much rain; the water glistened amongst the tombs and under the bushes; the hoofs splashed it, the wheels sank in it; the snow lying on the mountains showed white in the moonlight; the wild foxes stole and burrowed in the sand holes as Nero did before them; the owl and the bittern cried from the waving shrubs that covered the

site of lost cities ; the night's ride was long and horrible. Soracte was always before us.

Maryx spoke not one word.

We sped across the desolation of the Campagna in the teeth of the bitter north wind. It was late in March, but unusually cold ; and I remember the smell of the violets as we crushed them, and of the sweet buds that were springing in the grass.

Hours went by ere we reached the ilex forest of Daïla. The great white house was shut and silent ; dogs barked, and a mounted shepherd—a black weird figure against the moon—asked us what our errand was at such an hour ; then, recognizing us, doffed his hat and let us pass.

Maryx, who had authority therein, entered. No mere word of any servant would he take. The house was empty, dark, mournful ; the household was aroused from early sleep or friendly drinking, and could say nothing. Yes, their master had been there at three the day before, not since ; of him they knew nothing.

It was of no use to question them ; the people

who served Hilarion were trained to silence and to lies.

We passed through all the grand, desolate, ghostly rooms, one by one, missing no gallery or cabinet or smallest chamber; then, baffled, drove back to Rome in the lonely, ice-cold midnight, through the rain-pools and the thickets that were now quite dark, the moon having by this time set.

“What will you do?” I muttered to him as we passed the gate into the city and the guards of it.

“Find him,” he answered me.

I was deadly cold; my limbs were cramped; the mists and the winds of the night had penetrated my very bones; but something in his tone chilled me with a ghastlier chill. It seemed so simply plain to him that there could be no other way to reach her—only this.

For me, I would not own that she was other than somewhere astray, or sick and ill in one of the many favourite haunts she had in Rome.

“Let me down here,” I said to him midway in the Corso. “I will go and ask at the galleries

and palaces, and seek for her so. It will soon be dawn. The custodians all know me. She may be in the Borghese villa itself. They close at dusk, and she is so careless, you know, once dreaming——”

Maryx smiled : a smile I never thought to live to see on his noble and frank lips.

“Do you deceive yourself—still?” he said.

He did not seek any such solace as lies in a vain hope ; he knew the truth at once, and never pandered with it. It was his nature never to attempt to blind either himself or others.

As we neared the Ponte Sisto, there rose up from beneath my stall the small brown figure of a fisher-boy. It was Amphion.

He rose with difficulty and signed to me, and I went to him. He was shivering, and spoke disconnectedly.

“You did not know, but I knew. I, in the boat underneath, I could see his shadow so often. Oh, no ; no one knew. He was afraid of the woman with the great black eyes ; the woman they call a duchess. But he has cheated her. I have watched always, night and

day, underneath the bridge. But much I could not tell. So this morning they escaped me ; he is gone to Santa Chiara, and she goes too. What is that story she told me ?—Ariadnê who went away over the sea—you called her so—Ariadnê was left all alone. He will leave her just so ; he always does. I was with him a year, and I know. Does that man yonder care ? He looks so pale. You are too old and I am too young ; but he looks strong—does he listen ? I ran and ran and ran to be even with him this morning, and the horse struck at me and I fell. It was my head. I feel stupid. I do not think she saw ; that is why I did not come here before. I have been stupid all day. Oh, it is not much. That man is strong. Let him go—it will be too late ; but there is always vengeance.”

And then the lad swooned on the stones, having told the truth that Maryx had known without the telling.

Maryx listened ; and he never spoke once, not once. For me, I think I was mad for the moment. They have told me so since. For to me it was as though the sweet serene heavens

had opened to vomit a spawn of devils upon earth, and I would have sworn by my soul and the God who made it that she, my Ariadnê, would have borne the waters of the Tiber in a sieve by very force of her pure and perfect innocence, as did the Vestal Tuccia in this our Rome.

I was conscious of nothing till in the full light of day we drove against the wind on the way to Santa Chiara.

Santa Chiara was on the sea-coast. It was a little villa in a little bay; its roses and its orangeries grew to the sea's edge; it belonged to Hilarion, who sailed thence not seldom.

We went thither. It was many leagues away; there was no manner of reaching it possible except by horses. We drove out of Rome as the day broke.

There was no doubt now, nor any kind of hope.

It was sunset on the second day when we reached that portion of the coast where Santa Chiara was.

"Let me go alone," said Maryx.

He seemed to me to have aged suddenly in those two nights and days as men do in a score of years ; all his fearless royalty and carelessness of bearing were gone ; he was grey and haggard, and had that deadly bloodlessness of the olive-skin which is so much ghastlier than the pallor of fair faces ; he was quite silent, he whose warm fancies and eager eloquence had ever found so natural a vent in words.

“Let me go alone,” he said.

But I clung to him, holding him back. When men look as he looked, there is always death upon the air.

“What right have we ?” I said to him. “She is not ours by any tie of blood or name ; and what do we know ? She is not here, that I am sure, nor with him anywhere. God would not let all that nobility be trodden in the dust for a man’s vileness—oh, no ! oh, no ! What thought had she of love ? No more than the Nausicaa you made standing by the sea-shore, pure as the pearls of it. Amphion is not to be listened to ; he is a foolish boy——”

And then my words choked me ; for I remem-

bered how her face had looked as she had watched the Carnival pageantry, and how she had spoken that dark, wet, solitary night by Nero's Circus.

Maryx shook me roughly from him.

"Right? Do you want right to stop murder if you see it? And the murderer only kills the body, not the soul. Let me go."

"But if it be what you think—we are too late!"

The anguish upon his face smote me like a blow.

"There is always vengeance," he said, under his breath.

I was a Roman.

Vengeance to me was sacred as duty.

I let him go. I begrudged him the first right to it, but I could not gainsay it; he had the right of infinite patience, priceless gifts, and great and generous love—all wasted; the supreme and foremost rights of a great wronged passion.

The morning had risen clear and fair; here southward the sunshine laughed upon a brilliant

sea, deep-blue as the jewels men call sapphires ; it was far milder weather ; the orange-groves were as a green-and-golden wood to the water's edge ; the turf was azure with the wild hyacinths ; against the white walls ten thousand china roses blossomed, fresh as the little rosy mouths of children.

We, who for two days and nights had neither closed our eyes nor taken off our clothes, were cold and stiff from the heavy chills of long exposure. We shuddered like frozen things in all that radiant and elastic light, and delicate air, fragrant with the smell of the orange, fruit and flower, and with the glad salt scents of the surf that was breaking, curled and snowy, on the smooth beach at our feet.

But even vengeance was denied him.

The long, low house, white as a seashell and gay with many climbing plants, and walled all round with the high spears of aloes, was shut and silent even as Daila had been.

In an oval window a woman was sitting, making thread-lace with nimble hands, and singing amongst the little Bengalese roses.

Yes, the master had been there, but he had gone, sailed away in his own vessel, as his custom was. Yes, he had been gone twelve hours. Yes, there was some one with him; he was never alone, never alone. And the woman laughed, twisting the threads of her lace, knowing the ways of her employer. Then she looked across the roses seaward, and, shading her eyes from the sun, pointed to a vanishing speck of white on the horizon. That was the schooner, yes, if we looked quick; in another moment it would be out of sight.

We looked. The canvas shone for one second more in the sunshine far off, so far, no bigger than the leaf of a white camellia flower; then blended with the blent light of sea and sky, and vanished and was lost.

I laughed aloud.

“The sails should be black—they should be black!” I muttered, and caught at the roses to help me stand, and felt the earth and the water all swirl and heave in giddy eddies round me. “The sails should be black. Theseus has taken her, and he will leave her on Naxos, and he will

dance and laugh and garland the helm. Why
are the sails not black ? ”

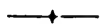
Then I fell down on the yellow sands.

And for a space I remember nothing more.





CHAPTER XII.



I do not remember how I found my way back to Rome. I lost sight of Maryx. I was clearly conscious of nothing till I felt the wet tongue of Palès against my cheek, and found that I was sitting on my own old bench beside my stall in the moonlight by the bridge. I suppose he must have brought me home. I do not know ; I had forgotten him. Perhaps he had forgotten me—why not ?

It was night, and the place was deserted. There was no one about, only some girl from an open window above in the street was singing aloud a love-song. I could have choked her throat into silence. It is not wonderful that there is so much crime on earth ; it is rather wonderful that there is so little, seeing how much

pain there is, pain that is the twin brother of madness.

It was the middle of the night. I think two or three days had gone by. I cursed the stones of the street because they had borne his steps, and the waters under the arches because they had not risen and swallowed him.

Ah, God ! in our hate (as in our love) how we feel our own cramped littleness ; we stretch our arms for the whole universe to give us vengeance, and the grand old dome of the sky seems to echo with inextinguishable laughter. Ah, God ! why are our hearts so great, our years so few and feeble—therein lie all the mockery and cruelty of life !

I sat there like a stupid frozen thing, the vast mighty heavens above me—the heavens that should have been full of weeping angels and of avenging swords, if there were any more heed of human souls than of the ants that crawl along black dust on a white summer-way.

The dog kissed me, moaning ; full of woe, because she knew that I was so.

I rose to my feet.

The Apollo Sandaliarius shone white in the moon rays. Surely, it was only yesterday that she had come to me there, having her hands on my stall, with the passion-flower and the poppy in her hands—the flower of death ?

Surely, it was but yesterday that I had dreamed my dream in Borghese ?

Then I looked at my things in the drawer under my stall ; the dog had guarded every thing safely, being fed, no doubt, by the neighbours.

There was in the drawer a long slender-pointed knife—a blade of steel made in past ages, and very keen ; I had used it to cut through the skins of leather. I put it in my breast, where it is most at home with a Roman.

After all, there was no other vengeance than the poor simple trite one, all too short, that never could quench the thirst of man yet, nor wash out any wrong ; there was no other. The skies did not fall—the stars did not pause in their courses. I looked at them. It seemed to me strange. I felt the edge of the knife, and waited for morning. There was only the old, old way.

“May death never come when you call on it!” said the old murdered man, Servianus, dying, to Hadrian. And in the after time Hadrian did cry on death to relieve him, and death would not come; not even his own hirelings would give the blow at his command; and the dead was avenged.

But then Servianus never saw his vengeance.

I would see mine; or rather, hers; so I told myself.

I was old, but I was strong enough for this.

I waited for the morning.

Of Maryx I had no thought.

I only saw the ship going away, away, away, over the shining silent sea in the clear daylight, with the white sails against the blue.

When the morning broke I went across the river, and across the fields, still misty, and wreathed with fog, to offices of the Vatican.

“You have offered me often many ducats for my Greek Hermes: give me them now, and take him,” I said to them; I, who had never sold the smallest fragment, or the rustiest relic of the arts I loved. They closed with me eagerly, having for many a year desired that fair Greek

thing for the great gallery they call the Pio Clementino.

“Put him next your Ariadnê!” I said to them, and laughed aloud in that grave palace of the Pope. They thought me mad, no doubt; but they desired the statue, and they took no heed of me.

I sold him without looking on him, as a man in a pagan land may sell a cherished son. But I had ceased to care for him; he was a dumb dead thing to me—a carven stone. The thought of any statue froze my blood.

They fetched him down with oxen and men, bearing his beautiful tender snow-white limbs along the streets, where of course he must have passed so often in other ages, throned and garlanded, in such processions of the gods as Ovid and his ladies loved to watch.

I never looked at him—not once; I clutched the money that the guardians of the galleries gave me, and signed something they pushed to me, and hurried out into the air; bells were ringing, and the sun was bright. I felt dizzy, and deaf, and blind.

Hermes woke all mortals from sleep with his wand at the break of the day. Oh! that he had not wakened me!

I clutched my wealth that I had bought with my bartered god as with some human life, and felt for my long narrow knife in the folds of my shirt, and hurried away on my quest.

I had no clue to guide me, for the sea is wide, and its shores are many. Yet I had no doubt but that I should find them—no doubt at all; and so I passed out of Rome. And Hermes was set in the great gallery, with the ray-crowned head of a Jupiter Anxur beside him, and at his feet a jasper basin of Assyria, in which Semiramis might once have bathed.

It does not matter where I wandered, nor how I fared; I went on no clue whatever save the well-known name of Hilarion, but whosoever has any sort of fame has lighted a beacon that is always shining upon him, and can never more return into the cool twilight of privacy, even when most he wishes; it is of these retributions—some call them compensations—of which life is full.

Hilarion living always, whether he would or no,

in the red light of that beacon fire, was not very difficult to track. I went my ground over and over, indeed, and made many a needless journey, but I had the money for my Hermes, which was a large sum, and more than enough; and so it came to pass that in the full heat of June, that sweetest month, when the stars are so many, and every scoul on earth it seems ought to be glad, I found him in Venice.

There in the shallow salt lagoons was riding his own pleasure vessel—the ship with the white sails. They said it was about to bear him eastward, to the old enchanted lands of the east.

The city was lovely, then in the full summer. I knew it well, and in my day had been happy there. Now it appeared to me hateful.

Its water streets were once familiar to one as the ways of Rome, and I had learned to row the fruit-boat to and fro, gorgeous with the autumn colours of their freight, and the beauty of the women of the Lido: now it was horrible to me.

The silence seemed like the awful stillness of a God-forgotten world; the gliding water seemed like the silvery sliding course of serpents; the

salt-scented beach of the marshy shores seemed like the sulphurous dank mists of the awful world where Persephone mourned.

I stumbled along the narrow footpaths of the place, and the song of the boatmen and the laughter of the little children, dancing and dabbling on the edges of the canals, jarred through my brain, as in other years the like must have jarred on the heavy pains of the condemned creatures in the cells beneath the water line.

I had no definite thought except to take his life.

The purpose had gone with me in my bosom ; had lain with me by night ; had grown to be a very part and parcel of myself, going with me over the blossoming lands in the summer of the year, lying down with me, and rising with me, —the last memory and the first.

It had no horror for me.

I was a Roman, and to me vengeance was duty ; beyond all other duty when it was vengeance for the innocent. I did not reason about it ; I only said to myself that he should die.

It was easy to find the palace where he dwelt in ; any one of the idlers of the street could show it me. He was famous.

The house was in a large street ; a great old palace fretted and fantastic, gilded and carved, and majestic, looming over the thread of dull waters in gorgeous sombreness, as it had loomed there in blind Dandolo's own day.

Generally, every thing passed near without entering this narrow, silent way ; it was out of the way of traffic ; there was a great bell tolling heavily from a tower near, and a flock of pigeons in the air, and the scent of lilies—these I noticed at the time. My sight was quite clear and my brain, too ; all I thought of was, where I should strike him.

If he would only come out into the air :——

I sat down in an angle of the stonework and waited. It was very early ; no one noticed me, an old man mooning by the water's side. I watched the house ; she, of course, was there, but strangely enough, I never thought of her then—my mind was intent, and solely intent, on him.

When you have said to yourself that you will kill any one, the world only seems to hold yourself and him, and God—who will see the justice done.

The lofty doors of the palace were open ; one could see straight up the marble steps into the courts and the halls ; they were all vast, and cool, and solitary ; not a soul seemed there.

Perhaps the people of the streets had misled me ? I rose and climbed the stone stairs, and entered the halls. I suppose some hours had gone by ; the sun was vertical, the porphyry shone red in it, and the yellow marble was like brass. I remember that as I trod on them.

There was no sound. I ascended the staircase, lined with the forms of giants and of heroes in the paled and peeling fresco of an heroic time. I held my knife closer, and mounted step after step. What if he heard—so best if it brought him forth. I would have stabbed him before an armed multitude ; for I had no desire to live after him.

I went on up the stately stairs and the painted landing-places ; there was a long gallery

in front at the head of the stairs, and many doors ; I opened the one that was nearest to me ; he might be there, if not I might learn of some one.

The chamber was immense, as our rooms are ; the light that fell through it was of all kinds of hues from falling through the glass of painted casements.

I went on across half its length, over its polished floor of many-coloured stones ; there came on my ear a sudden cry of welcome—low, surprised and happy as the summer cry of any bird ; in the lily-scented air, in the halo of coloured sunlight, she sprang up before me, glad and beautiful as any human thing could ever be, clothed in white, with a golden fillet on her forehead, and at her breast a knot of crimson carnations.

I stood still, stupified and afraid ; I had forgotten her.

“Dear friend ! is it you ?” she cried, with a pure and happy tone in her voice.

How shall I tell the change that had passed over her ? Just such a change as I had seen

when in my dream, the bronze of the Borghese had blushed and moved and started into sudden life. Not greater the change upon the face of earth when from the still grey silvery dawn, in which the stars are trembling, the glory comes, and the sun shines over the hills.

What is it that Love does to a woman?—without it she only sleeps; with it, alone, she lives.

Never in all my years have I seen happiness so perfect, so exquisite, so eloquent without a word, as was in her face, her air, her very limbs and movements; before, she had been lovely as the statues were, and like them mute and cold, and scarcely human; now her eyes were like the light of day, her mouth was like the dew-wet rose, her whole form seemed to thrill with the grace and the gladness and the glory and the passion of life.

I stood before her stupidly and dumb.

“Dear friend, is it you?” she said, and came and took my hands and smiled.

What could I say to her? I had come to kill him.

“I must have seemed so thankless in my silence,” she said, softly. “It hurt me to keep silence—but he wished it so.”

I drew my hands away. I hated her to touch me.

“You are happy then!” I said, and was dumb, staring upon her, for there were in her such power, such loveliness, such radiance—and all the while she was looking in my eyes with the sweet candour of a fearless innocence.

“Happy!” she smiled, as she echoed the word.

No doubt it seemed so poor to her, and feeble to measure all she felt. Then all the old pride came into her eyes.

“He loves me!” she said, under her breath; as if that said all.

“Do you remember I wanted to know what happiness was?” she said, after a little while.

“Do you remember my asking the girls under the trees by Castel Gondolfo? As if one could ever know until——”

Then the warm colour stole over her face, and

she smiled, and the dreamy wondering look I knew so well came into her eyes, and she seemed to forget me.

I stood gripping the handle of my knife. I could not take my gaze from her. She seemed transfigured. To such a creature as this, in the fresh glory of her joy, what could one say of shame and of the world's scorn, and of her wrongs, and of the mockery of women?

Then her eyes came back from their musing towards me, and her thoughts with them.

"And did you come to find me? That is so good; you were always so good, and I seem always thankless. I wished to tell you, but he would not; and Maryx too, it must have seemed to him, also, so thankless. Only now he will know—he will understand."

"You look at me strangely! Are you tired?" she added, as I kept silence. "Why will you stand? Are you angered?"

"Are you happy?" I said hoarsely. How could I say to her, "I came to kill your seducer!"

"Am I?" she said, very low, under her

breath. "What ! when he loves me ? Do you remember—I was always afraid of Love, because it is all one's life, and one is no more oneself, but breathes through another's lips, and has no will any more, and no force. But now I know ; there is no other thing worth living for or dying for—there is no other life. Do you remember—I used to wonder why women looked so happy, and why they used to go and pray with wet eyes, and why the poets wrote, and the singers sang. Now I know—there is only one good on all the earth, and it is more beautiful to love than even to be loved."

Then a sudden blush came all over her cheek and throat, and she paused suddenly, ashamed ; as if some beauty of her form had been suddenly lain bare to curious eyes.

"Come and look !" she said, and touched my hand with hers ; and it seemed to me as though flame burnt me ; and she went on a little way across the chamber, and drew back a curtain of brocade with heavy fringes, and signed me to pass beneath it.

Quite mechanically and stupidly I followed her,

and on the other side of the curtain I saw a lovely eight-sided vaulted room, like many of the palace rooms in our own Rome, and here there were marbles white and grey, and clay, and the tools of sculpture ; and the light was pouring in from a high casement that faced the sea.

“ Look ! ” she said, and showed me a statue, only in the clay as yet, but very beautiful.

It would be difficult to tell where its infinite beauty lay.

You can describe a picture, but not a statue. Marble is like music : it can never be measured or told of in words. What can any one know of the beauty of the Belvedere Mercury, who has not looked up in its face ?

This solitary figure was Love ; but the loveliest and noblest Love that ever human hand had fashioned, surpassing even the perfect Thespian Love of Borghese. All the passion of the whole world, and all the dreams of lovers, and all the visions of heaven that have ever come to poets in their sleep, were in the languor of its musing eyes, and in the smile of its closed lips.

“What can all earth and all eternity bestow worth one hour that I give?” this great Love asked you by a look.

Yet the face was only the face of Hilarion; but that face transfigured, as those eyes of hers which worshipped him beheld it; unlike the face of any mortal;—great as godhead, and glorious as the morning.

I stood in silence.

I could have struck the statue down, and cleft it from head to foot, as the false god it was. But then it was god to her.

She looked at it, and then at me, and sank upon a block of stone that stood there near, ruffling back her dusky gold of curls, and smiling, while the carnations fell out from her bosom at Love's feet.

“Look! this he knows that I have done, for he has seen it grow under my hands out of the mere moist earths; and now he *does* believe. Look! you will tell Maryx. It is greater than anything I ever did; that I know; but it is because I look up in his face, and find it there. He is glad, because he knows that it is mine,

and he says they will say ‘No girl’s hand ever made that.’ What does it matter if they think so? he knows! and then when they say that it is beautiful, after all it will be him whom they praise, and if it should live after me, long long ages, like the Faun, people will not think of me, but only of him, and they will tell one another his name—not mine. And that is what I pray for always. Who can care for fame for oneself alone? But to tell the world in all that Hereafter that one never will see, how beautiful was what we loved, so that even when one is dead, one will seem to live for them, and to serve them—that is almost like immortality. Oh, the gods were good when they gave me that power, for in all the other ages I shall be able to make men see what he is now, and all that he is to me!”

Then she laughed, a sweet little low laughter, the tears of an exceeding joy wet upon her eyelids all the while; and she bent and kissed the feet of the statue.

“Maryx used to say that Love killed Art,” she murmured. “You will tell him now—oh,

how I pity him, that he does not know what love is ! ”

And softly she kissed again the feet of her god.

Then, with a sudden flush over all her throat and bosom, for it was unlike her to show any emotion, or to pour forth thought in open words, she sat still on the block of stone at the base of the Love, with dreaming suffused eyes and silent lips.

“ It will be in marble soon,” she said, after a space. “ I shall carve it all with my own hands, no one shall touch it in any line. I can ‘ hew the rocks,’ you know ; Maryx was so good to teach me. This will be great, that I can feel ; but then I have had only to look in his face.”

What could I say to her ? her innocence was so perfect, so perfect her joy and her pride ; and to speak to her of the world, and the ways of its men and its women, seemed like a very blasphemy.

And the statue was great.

Perhaps she had only looked in his face, but

she had seen it through the greatness of her own passion, and of her own soul.

She rose quickly and put out her hand.

“Come away; he does not wish it to be seen; not yet.”

I did not take her hand.

“He is your only law!” I said, and stopped, for how could I say to her all that consumed my heart?

She looked at me in surprise.

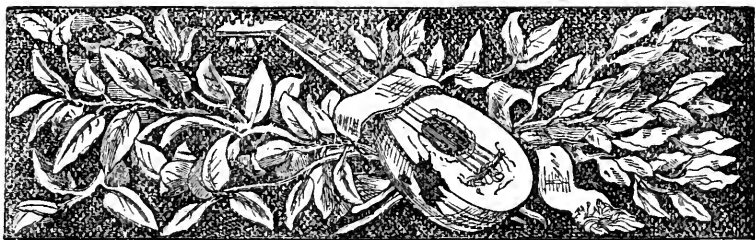
“I do not know that any one else even lives,” she said, simply.

It was quite true, no doubt.

A great love is an absolute isolation, and an absolute absorption. Nothing lives or moves or breathes save one life: for one life alone the sun rises and sets, the seasons revolve, the clouds bear rain, and the stars ride on high; the multitudes around cease to exist, or seem but ghostly shades; of all the sounds of earth there is but one voice audible; all past ages have been but the herald of one soul; all eternity can be but its heritage alone.

Oh children of the world, what know you of such love?—no more than the blind worm creeping to its fellow knows of the morning glory of the day.





CHAPTER XIII.

I stood by the base of the statue, and gazed still stupidly upon her. Her eyes were shining, sweet, and tender, and abstracted, through the glad tears that were upon their lashes.

Whatever else he had done basely he had made her happy—as yet.

Perhaps she was right: for a few hours of joy one owes the debt of years, and should give a pardon wide and deep as the deep sea.

This Love which she had made in his likeness, the tyrant and compeller of the world, was to her as the angel which brings perfect dreams, and lets the tired sleeper visit heaven;—who could tell her that her god was but a thing of clay? Not I;

not I. And yet I could have wept with very tears of blood. She dropped the curtain, and came and stood by me.

“You will not come away?” she said; “well, never mind, it does not matter for you to see it; you will go home and tell Maryx. Tell him, that if I seem thankless, I have not forgotten all his noble lessons. You will wait with me; stay all day? In half an hour he will be back, and he will be so glad to see you: oh, that I am sure——”

“He will be back soon?” I felt for the knife underneath my shirt.

“Yes; he had only gone to his boat—that pretty ship that is in the harbour.”

“The ship with the white sails? I know, I know!”

I laughed aloud: she looked at me surprised, and in a little fear.

“And when the ship sails away without you?” I said brutally, and laughing still, because the mention of the schooner had broken the bonds of the silence that had held me against my will half paralysed, and I seemed to be again upon the

Tyrrhene shore, seeing the white sail fade against the sky.

“ And when that ship sails without you ? The day will come. It always comes. You are my Ariadnê ; yet you forget Naxos ! Oh, the day will come ! you will kiss the feet of your idol then, and they will not stay ; they will go away, away, away, and they will not tarry for your prayers or your tears—ay, it is always so. Two love, and one tires. And you know nothing of that ; you who would have love immortal ! ”

And I laughed again, for it seemed to me so horrible, and I was half mad.

No doubt it would have been kinder had I struck my knife down into her breast with the words unspoken.

All shade of colour forsook her face, only the soft azure of the veins remained, and changed to an ashen grey. She shook with a sudden shiver from head to foot as the name she hated, the name of Ariadnê, fell upon her ear. The icebolt had fallen in her paradise. A scared and terrible fear dilated her eyes that opened wide in the amaze of some suddenly stricken creature.

“And when he leaves you?” I said, with cruel iteration. “Do you remember what you told me once of the woman by the marshes by the sea, who had nothing left by which to remember love save wounds that never healed? That is all his love will leave you by-and-by.”

“Ah, never!”

She spoke rather to herself than me. The terror was fading out of her eyes, the blood returning to her face; she was in the sweet bewildered trance of that blind faith which goes wherever it is led, and never asks the end nor dreads the fate. Her love was deathless: how could she know that his was mortal?

“You are cruel,” she said, with her mouth quivering, but the old soft, grand courage in her eyes. “We are together for ever; he has said so. But even if—if—I only remembered him, by wounds, what would that change in me? He would *have* loved me. If he would wish to wound me, so he should. I am his own as the dogs are. Think!—he looked at me and all the world grew beautiful; he touched me, and I was happy—I, who never had been happy in my life. You look

at me strangely ; you speak harshly ; why ? I used to think, surely you would be glad——”

I gripped my knife and cursed him in my soul.

How could one say to her the thing that he had made her in man's and woman's sight ?

“I thought you would be glad,” she said, wistfully, “and I would have told you long ago—myself. I do not know why you should look so. Perhaps you are angered because I seemed ungrateful to you and Maryx ? Perhaps I was so. I have no thought—only of him. What he wished, that I did. Even Rome itself was for me nothing, and the gods—there is only one for me ; and he is with me always. And I think the serpents and the apes are gone forever from the tree, and he only hears the nightingales—now. He tells me so often. Very often. Do you remember I used to dream of greatness for myself,—ah, what does it matter ! I want nothing now. When he looks at me, the gods themselves could give me nothing more.”

And the sweet tranquil radiance came back into her eyes, and her thoughts wandered into

the memories of this perfect passion which possessed her, and she forgot that I was there.

My throat was choking; my eyes felt blind; my tongue clove to my mouth. I, who knew what that end would be as surely as I knew the day then shining would sink into the earth, I was dumb like a brute-beast: I, who had gone to take his life!

Before this love which knew nothing of the laws of mankind, how poor and trite and trivial looked those laws! What could I dare to say to her of shame? Ah! if it had only been for any other's sake! But he,—perhaps he did not lie to her; perhaps he did only hear the nightingales with her beside him; but how soon their song would pall upon his ear, how soon would he sigh for the poisonous kiss of the serpents! I knew! I knew!

I stood heart-broken in the warm light that was falling through the casement and streaming towards her face. What could I say to her? Men harder and sterner, and surer in every way of their own judgment, than I was of mine, no doubt would have shaken her with harsh hands

from that dream in which she had wandered to her own destruction.

No doubt, a sterner moralist than I would have had no pity, and would have hurled on her all the weight of those bitter truths of which she was so ignorant; would have shown her that pit of earthly scorn upon whose brink she stood; would have torn down all that perfect credulous faith of hers which could have no longer life nor any more lasting root than the flowering creeper born of a summer's sun, and gorgeous as the sunset's hues, and clinging about a ruin mantling decay. Oh yes, no doubt. But I am only weak, and of little wisdom, and never certain that the laws and ways of the world are just, and never capable of long giving pain to any harmless creature, least of all to her.

She seemed to rouse herself with effort to remember I was there, and turned on me her eyes that were suffused and dreamful with happiness, like a young child's with sleep.

"I must have seemed so thankless to you: you were so very good to me," she said with that serious sweetness of her rare smile that

I had used to watch for, as an old dog watches for his young owner's—an old dog that is used to be forgotten, but does not himself forget, though he is old. “I must have seemed so thankless ; but he bade me be silent, and I have no law but him. After that night when we walked in Nero's fields, and I went home and learned he loved me ;—do you not see I forgot that there was anyone in all the world except himself and me ? It must always be so—at least, so I think. Oh, how true that poem was ! Do you remember how he read it that night after Mozart, amongst the roses, by the fire ? What use was endless life, and all the lore of the spirits and the seers, to Sospitra ? I was like Sospitra, till he came ; always thinking of the stars and the heavens, in the desert, all alone, and always wishing for life eternal, when it is only life *together* that is worth a wish or a prayer. But why do you look at me so ? Perhaps you do not understand ? Perhaps I am selfish.”

This was all that it seemed to her : that I did not understand. Could she see the tears of blood that welled up in my eyes, could she see the

blank despair that blinded my sight? could she see the frozen hand that I felt clutching at my heart and benumbing it? I did not understand: that was all that it seemed to her.

She was my Ariadnê, born again to suffer the same fate. I saw the future: she could not. I knew that he would leave her, as surely as the night succeeds the day. I knew that his passion—if passion indeed it were, and not only the mere common vanity of subjugation and possession—would pall on him and fade out, little by little, as the stars fade out of the grey morning skies. I knew, but I had not the courage to tell her.

Men were faithful only to the faithless. But what could she know of this?

“Thinking of the stars and of the heavens in the desert all alone! Yes!” I cried; and the bonds of my silence were unloosed, and the words rushed from my lips like a torrent from between the hills.

“Yes, and never to see the stars any more, and to lose for ever the peace of the desert—that you think is gain! Oh, my dear! what

can I say to you? What can I say? You will not believe if I tell you. I shall seem a liar, and a prophet of false woe. I shall curse when I would bless. What can I say to you? Athene watched over you. You were of those who dwell alone, but whom the gods are with. You had the clue and the sword, and they are nothing to you; you loose them both at his word, at the mere breath of his lips, and know no god but his idle law, that shifts as the wind of the sea. And you count that gain? Oh, just heaven! Oh, my dear, my heart is broken; how can I tell you? One man loved you who was great and good, to whom you were a sacred thing, who would have lifted you up in heaven, and never have touched too roughly a single hair of your head; and you saw him no more than the very earth that you trod; he was less to you than the marbles he wrought in; and he suffers; and what do you care? You have had the greatest wrong that a woman can have, and you think it the greatest good, the sweetest gift! He has torn your whole life down as a cruel hand tears a rose in the morning light; and

you rejoice! For what do you know? He will kill your soul, and still you will kiss his hand. Some women are so. When he leaves you, what will you do? For you, there will only be death. The weak are consoled, but the strong never. What will you do? What will you do? You are like a child that culls flowers at the edge of a snake's breeding pit. He waked you—yes!—to send you in a deeper sleep, blind and dumb to everything but his will. Nay, nay! that is not your fault. Love does not come at will; and of goodness it is not born, nor of gratitude, nor of any right or reason on the earth. Only that you should have had no thought of us—no thought at all—only of him by whom your ruin comes; that seems hard! Ay, it is hard. You stood just so in my dream, and you hesitated between the flower of passion and the flower of death. Ah, well might Love laugh; they grow on the same bough; Love knows that. Oh, my dear, my dear, I come too late! Look! He has done worse than murder, for that only kills the body; but he has killed the soul in

you. He will crush out all that came to you from heaven ; all your mind, and your hopes, and your dreams, and all the mystery in you, that we poor half-dumb fools call genius, and that made the common daylight above you full of all beautiful shapes and visions that our duller eyes could not see as you went. He has done worse than murder, and I came to take his life. Ay, I would slay him now as I would strangle the snake in my path. And even for this I come too late. I cannot do you even this poor last service ! To strike him dead would only be to strike you too. I come too late ! Take my knife, lest I should see him—take it ;—till he leaves you I will wait.”

I drew the fine, thin blade across my knee, and broke it in two pieces, and threw the two halves at her feet.

Then I turned without looking once at her, and went away.

I do not know how the day waned and passed ; the skies seemed red with fire, and the canals with blood. I do not know how I found my road over the marble floors and out

into the air. I only remember that I felt my way feebly with my hands, as though the golden sunlight were all darkness, and that I groped my way down the steps and out under an angle of the masonry, staring stupidly upon the gliding waters.

I do not know whether a minute had gone by, or many hours, when some shivering sense of sound made me look up at the casement above, a high vast casement fretted with dusky gold and many colours, and all kinds of sculptured stone. The sun was making a glory as of jewels on its painted panes. Some of them were open; I could see within the chamber Hilarion's fair and delicate head, and his face drooped with a soft smile. I could see her with all her loveliness melting, as it were, into his embrace, and see her mouth meet his.

If I had not broken the steel!——

I rose from the stones and cursed them, and departed from the place as the moon rose.



CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN I went back to my place by Ponte Sisto, I think the Faun in the fountain was dead or gone. I never heard him any more ; I never have heard him ever again.

Is Nature kind or cruel ? Who can tell ?

The cyclone comes, or the earthquake ; the great wave rises and swallows the cities and the villages, and goes back whence it came ; the earth yawns, and devours the pretty towns and the sleeping children, the gardens where the lovers were sitting, and the churches where women prayed, and then the morass dries up and the gulf unites again. Men build afresh, and the grass grows, and the trees, and all the flowering seasons come back as of old. But the dead are dead : nothing changes that !

As it is with the earth, so it is with our life ; our own poor, short, little life, that is all we can really call our own.

Calamities shatter, and despair engulfs it ; and yet after a time the chasm seems to close ; the storm wave seems to roll back ; the leaves and the grass return ; and we make new dwellings. That is, the daily ways of living are resumed, and the common tricks of our speech and act are as they used to be before disaster came upon us. Then wise people say, he or she has "got over it." Alas, alas ! the drowned children will not come back to us ; the love that was struck down, the prayer that was silenced, the altar that was ruined, the garden that was ravished, they are all gone for ever,—for ever,—for ever ! Yet we live ; because grief does not always kill, and often does not speak.

I went back to my stall, and to Palès, because habit is strong and I was old.

The people spared me, and asked few questions. There is more kindness than we think in human nature ; at least when it has nothing to gain by being otherwise than kind.

And I began to stitch leather, though all around me seemed to have grown grey and black, and the voices of the merry crowds hurt me as a finger hurts, that lightly and roughly touches a deep wound. It is hard for us when we shrink from the innocent laughter of others, and when the cloudy day seems kinder than the sunshine.

I shut the shutters of my window that looked upon the river, and locked the door of the chamber. It seemed to me accursed.

From the moment that Maryx and I saw the sail against the sky, white as a gull's wing—the sail that should have been sable as the night—no word passed his lips or mine to one another. He would not speak. I dared not. There are some wrongs, some griefs, so dire that you cannot put words to them.

When, timidly, after many days, I ventured up through the aloes and the myrtle to his house, being afraid of what I had seen upon his face that day by the sea-shore, I saw in the first chamber a statue thrown down, broken and headless; the head was only a little mound of white and grey marble dust.

The old man, Giulio, came and stood by me. Tears rolled down his cheeks. I envied them.

“My master did that,” he said; “did it the night he returned. He struck it down with a mallet, blow after blow. The beautiful thing! It seemed like a murder.”

The statue was what had been the Nausicaa’s. I turned away, I dared not ask for him.

“He works as usual,” said Giulio.

The little old brown woman tottered in, more than ever like a dull dusky leaf that a breeze blows about feebly; she shook me gently, and pointed to the fallen marble.

“It is as I told you it would be; the marble has killed him,” said his mother. “Yes; he works, he breathes, he moves, he speaks. There is nothing to see, perhaps—not for others; but he is dead for all that. I am his mother, and I know——”

I crept away sick, as with some remorse, and feeling as though guilty of some heavy sin. Why had I meddled with Fortune, the maker and mocker of men? Why had I dared to

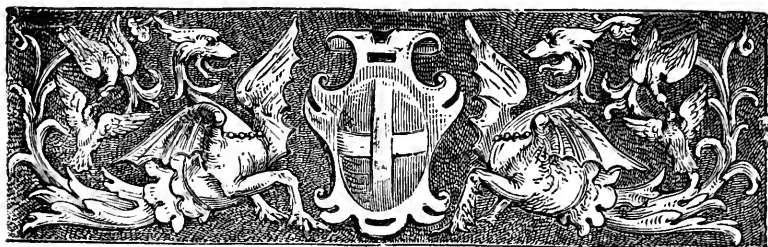
compel Fate that day when he had paused by me to take up the Wingless Love ?

What was my grief beside his ? and what my wrong ? All the great gifts of his great soul he had given ; and they had been uncounted, and wasted, like water spilled upon the ground.

I crept through the myrtles downward, away from the house where the statue lay shattered. The earliest of the nightingales of the year was beginning her lay in some leafy covert hard by, but never would he hear music in their piping again ; never, never : any more than I should hear the song of the Faun in the fountain.

For the song that we hear with our ears is only the song that is sung in our hearts.

And his heart, I knew, would be for ever empty and silent, like a temple that has been burned with fire, and left standing, pitiful and terrible, in mockery of a lost religion, and of a forsaken god.



CHAPTER XV.

THE months wore on ; those colourless, long, slow-footed spaces of time, so heavy as they pass, so dead a blank to remember and try to number, which all men and all women know into whose life has come any great grief ; spaces of time where one lives and moves, and eats and drinks, and sleeps, ay, and even may laugh perhaps (heaven help one !), and yet all the while, as the mother of Maryx said, one is dead—quite dead—for any pulse of real bright life that beats in us.

“What is she to you ?” my good friends of the Rione said. “Only a stray girl, come and gone—no more ; have reason.”

Ay, truly she was no more to me, and yet she had taken with her all the gladness I had

had and all the peace ; and when I sat stitching leather for old Rome the world seemed very dark.

I remained fettered, as the poor are fettered, hand and foot to the soil by poverty.

I had no other Hermes to sell.

I stayed by my stall, stitching and seeing nothing that I did, and doing my work so ill that people were angry and began to forsake me entirely. Those very poor folks whose sandals and shoes I had always cobbled for nothing but goodwill being the first and loudest to say that I was purblind.

It did not matter very much ; I wanted so very little for myself, and I could always get enough food for the dog, any day, from Pippo's stove ; only, all the peace of my simple life was gone, and gone for ever. It seems hard when one does no wrong, and has no envy or ill feeling of any kind, and only takes delight in the mere open air and the mere movement of life, and the charm of the arts and the innocent mysteries of study and antiquity—it seems hard, I say, when these things are one's joy and can hurt no one, to have all one's pleasure in them dashed out of one's

keeping like a slender glass that is shivered on the ground.

It seems hard.

But I tried to think that it did not matter. I was old, and it was only dying a little before my time to have the days become so grey and empty, and the sky seem only a hollow gourd, and the trouble of birth and of death feel too great for the short, sad, hurried, impotent handful of years that divide the two; and I stayed on at my stall, and the fountain was only a confused and tiresome sound, and the hastening of the people's feet over the bridge seemed cruel—why did they hasten when mine could not?—and all I sat thinking of was of my dream in Borghese that summer noon when the white statues had awakened and spoken.

It was only a dream. No, of course; it was only a dream. Often I went there, and would have called to them to have mercy; but they were only marble; the beautiful Thespian Love was mute as stone, and the Roman woman on her bier kept the flowers of oblivion close folded in her hands and would not yield them.

It had been only a dream ; only a dream.

“ Oh, God ! must she suffer for that ? ” I cried always in my heart ; and wandered Rome stupidly ; and, if a son can hate his mother most revered, almost I hated the stones of Rome. For I was sure that Hilarion had left, or would leave, her ; and who could tell whether she were living or dead ?

They who live after Naxos are base ; and she was holy as any creature sleeping in a virgin martyr’s tomb in the womb of the earth, under the city, laid to rest in the hope of Christ.

Ah, yes ! for a great love is a great holiness. Ye fools and pharisees have said otherwise, because it is as far beyond you as the stars of the night.

Rome itself seemed to me to shrivel and grow small, lying in the circle of the mountains dead as the nymph Canens had lain dead by Tiber’s side.

Sometimes I would climb up the winding road, and stand under the cedars, and look at the sea from the heights above the city, and wish and wish——

But I was old and poor.

Palès and I could only look till the blue gleam faded into the dusk of night, and go back wearily with our heads drooped to our corner by the fountain, the fountain in which there was no music for us now, but only the noisy gushing of water restless to escape, and the sharp ring of the women's brazen jars.

Sometimes I would go and stand before my lost Hermes.

"That was mine once," I said to a stranger who was calling it most lovely where it stood on the mosaic floors, bathed in the sunlight.

He looked at me in contempt, and went and spoke to one of the Swiss guards, thinking me mad or drunk, no doubt.

I never dared, I have said, to name her to Maryx—never. There was a look on his face when I passed him by in the streets that daunted one into fear and silence.

But one night after several months, I came upon him suddenly in the dead silence of the Flavian amphitheatre.

It was midnight and moonlight: the plants that then grew like a green wreath in the

travertine stood out clear in every stem and leaf against the cold blue light of the skies; the water glistened in the underground cells; the newt ran and the toad squatted in the seat of emperors.

I know not what in the silence and the solemnity of the awful place opened my lips. Stopping him, as he would have passed me, we two alone in the vast space, I told him all that I had seen at Venice, and all that I had gone thither meaning to do.

He shrank with an irrepressible gesture at the first word, as a man shrinks when a nerve in his flesh is laid bare; then he stood still and heard me to the end.

He was a very proud man, and he had never said to her, or to me, or to anyone, that he had loved her.

He heard me in patience to the end; then he said slowly, with the paleness of a great suppressed emotion on his face,

“Yes; if one could strike him without striking her, do you think I would have let him live a day? Not that we have any right—you

and I. We are nothing to her! You forget. We never had any hold on her—not even as her friends. We gave her all we had to give; it counted nothing; that was not our fault, nor hers. We missed the way, he found it.”

Then he was silent.

He had found it; yes, he who found it without effort, cost, or sacrifice, and would turn aside from it when another path beguiled him, as easily as a child runs a little way through the daisies in a flowering meadow and then tires of it, he knows not why, and throws his gathered blossoms down, and runs away!

Maryx looked up at the skies where the moon was sailing high in a clear space where the storm-wreath of the clouds had parted and left it free.

As its light fell on his features, one saw how aged they were and worn, with all the bold and noble cast of them fatigued and hardened, and their lines deepened like the channel of a river after a heavy flood. He had suffered very terribly; this man who had owned to no suffering save such as the ruthless blows of his mallet on his

own marble had shown when he had shattered the Nausicaa.

It was all still about us. The mighty place was in deep shadow. The stations of Christ were blacker than all the rest, and the cross in the midst was shrouded in gloom, as though it were the very hour of the Crucifixion.

Maryx, whose hand leaned on it, shook it with the force of a sudden shudder that ran through him.

“We must wait. When he leaves her, then——”

The Cross of Christ has been called in witness of many an oath of vengeance, but it never heard one more just than the one that was then sworn mutely by it.

He waited—that was all. Vengeance only demands a long patience.

And I—remembering—felt that he would have few years to wait.

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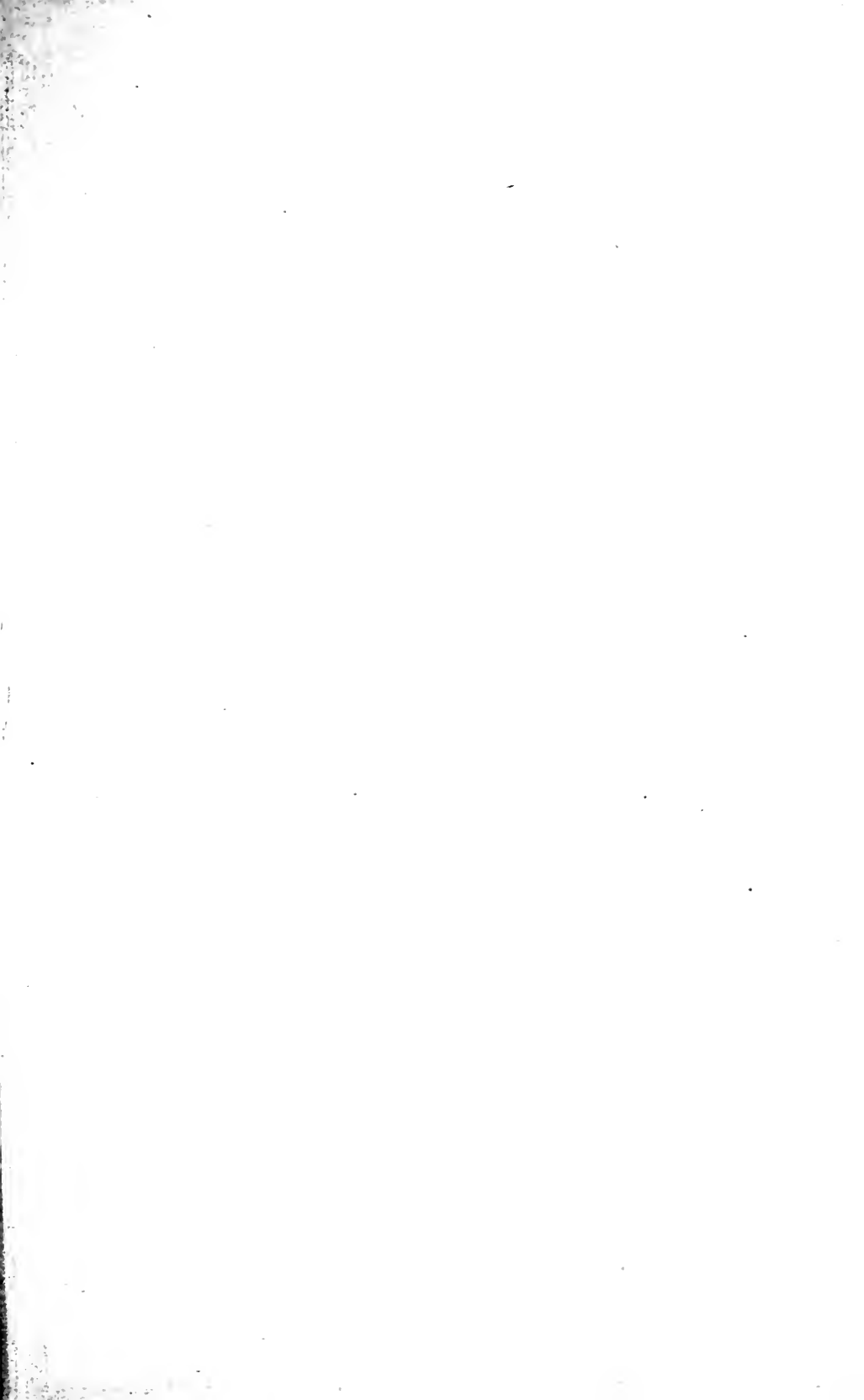
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